

# Genres in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson & the Olympians Series

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Master's thesis / Diplomski rad

2022

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Učiteljski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:147:152292>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-07-09**

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

**Marija Paljuši**

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*OLYMPIANS* SERIES**

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**Zagreb, srpanj 2022.**

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## SAŽETAK

Cilj ovog diplomskog rada je razlučiti kojim žanrovima pripada serijal Ricka Riordana *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) (*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005), *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2006), *Percy Jackson and the Titan's Curse* (2007), *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian* (2009)) te u kojoj su mjeri tradicionalni žanrovi dječje književnosti i druge književne vrste uočljive u serijalu. U navedenim je romanima prepoznato šest najzastupljenijih žanrova i vrsta: obiteljska priča, školska priča, Bildungsroman, mit, fantastika i pustolovna priča. Neki od njih, poput žanra obiteljske i školske priče, zajedno s Bildungsromanom, očituju se samo u nekim aspektima romana. Navedena tri žanra imaju brojne karakteristike koje se ne mogu pronaći u Riordanovu serijalu. No, kako ovaj diplomski rad i zaključuje, ne moraju sve karakteristike nekoga žanra biti zastupljene u djelu kako bi mu to djelo pripadalo. Nadalje, tri preostala žanra, mit, fantastika i pustolovna priča također su istaknuti u serijalu. Mitovi koje Riordan koristi vezani su uz grčke bogove i mitološka stvorenja kao što su Meduza, Kalipso i Polifem. Fantastika, žanr koji je usko povezan s mitom, dijeli se na brojne podkategorije, a djela Ricka Riordana mogu se povezati s nekima od njih. Primjerice, to su kategorije mješovite fantastike koja uključuje fantastiku putovanja, te tzv. kategorija herojsko-etičke fantastike. Ovaj diplomski rad pokazuje da je Rick Riordan romane o Percyju Jacksonu temeljio na mitu te da je time stvorio modernu mitološku, fantastičnu i pustolovnu priču.

Ključne riječi: školska priča, obiteljska priča, Bildungsroman, mit, fantastika, pustolovna priča

## **SUMMARY**

The aim of this thesis is to identify the genres which Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009), a series of five novels (*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005), *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2006), *Percy Jackson and the Titan's Curse* (2007), *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian* (2009)) incorporates, and to ascertain to what extent individual genres are represented in the series. The thesis distinguishes six genres as the most prominent in the novels: the family story, the school story, Bildungsroman, myth, fantasy and the adventure story. Each of these genres will be examined and viewed in the context of the series. The family and the school story, as well as Bildungsroman, are manifested in some aspects of the series. The three genres have many more attributes which cannot be detected as significant. However, as is stated in this thesis, there is no need for every attribute to be incorporated into the story for it to establish relationships with a certain genre. Three other genres, myth, fantasy and the adventure story genre, are prominent in Riordan's series. The myths that Riordan uses in his novels are those of Greek gods and heroes and mythological creatures such as the Medusa, Calypso and Polyphemus. Fantasy, a genre closely associated with myth, is divided into numerous categories, and Rick Riordan's works reflect some of them. The series is recognized as a work that falls within the category of mixed fantasy, more specifically journey fantasy, and within the category of heroic-ethical fantasy. This thesis shows that Rick Riordan largely based his novels on myth, thus creating a modern-day mythological fantasy amply interwoven with elements of the adventure story.

Key words: school story, family story/domestic tale, Bildungsroman, myth, fantasy, adventure story

## 1 Introduction

Children's literature, a category of works written mostly by adults for children but read by both children and adults, although focused primarily on children, has existed since there have been children (Lerer 2008). It includes many genres, ranging from moral and instructive tales, school stories, family stories, and Bildungsroman to fantasy and adventure stories. Many works for children incorporate several genres simultaneously. For example, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) is a blend of fantasy and adventure, and to some extent Bildungsroman as well, while L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) is a family story, school story and Bildungsroman.

This thesis will examine the presence of different genres, and the extent to which they manifest, in the five-novel series *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) written by Rick Riordan. The thesis will focus on the novels *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005), *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2006), *Percy Jackson and the Titan's Curse* (2007), *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian* (2009). Riordan's series of novels has not been analysed in terms of genres but rather because of their plot, which is based on Greek mythology. Thus, the paper aims to analyse the novels only in terms of the genres they contain.

Each section of the thesis will focus on one of the genres recognized in the aforementioned series of novels. The thesis begins with an introduction to the series in general. After briefly describing the series and its prominent genres, it then moves on to an analysis of individual genres in six separate chapters: the school story; the family story; the Bildungsroman; allusions to myths and usage of mythological material; fantasy, which is closely connected to myth; and the adventure story. The conclusion summarizes the findings.

## 2 Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*

Children's literature "is not a uniform genre, but a broader category, incorporating a wide variety of different genres, some of which are action oriented, optimistic, and didactic, while others are not" (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 50). Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) series of novels incorporates several different genres. The most prominent genres of the novels are fantasy, myth, and the adventure story. Even though the three genres are more evident, the school story, the family story, and Bildungsroman are also represented in the novels to some extent. This thesis will examine these six genres in the context of the five-novel series.

The novels are set in the USA of the twenty-first century but incorporate characters and stories from Greek mythology. Throughout the series Riordan gradually introduces the readers to myths, stories based on beliefs (Nikolajeva, 2005) centred on the ancient gods, while adding characters not known from myths and situations they find themselves in (Barone, 2001). Riordan uses Greek mythology to tell a story about a twelve-year-old boy called Percy who realises he is related to a Greek god and who, as a result, has to change his belief that gods and mythological beings cannot exist. Percy's everyday life becomes fights between monsters and heroes, or travels to ancient places through secret doorways (portals). These are recognized as elements of the fantasy genre. Moreover, the two worlds, the modern realistic and the ancient Greek world, exist in parallel and provide Percy with the opportunity to go on many quests and adventures. This means that the stories Riordan creates are a mythological fantasy that meets the adventure story (Grenby, 2008). Riordan's novels contain such identifiers of the adventure stories as quests, fights and journeys that Percy and his peers occupy themselves with, together with the excitement of the heroic quest. Upon discovering that he is related to a god (he is Poseidon's son), Percy is enrolled in a school, more precisely a camp, for young people of his kind, called half-bloods. The readers see how the school system works, what the children learn, and how they spend their days. The characters find themselves in deadly situations many times and go through hardships, but by helping each other they manage to survive and save the world. Percy receives help from his mother and his friends from the camp. At the beginning of the first novel in the series, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2013), when he finds out his father is a Greek god, and that this makes him a demigod, Percy and his mortal mother stop spending much time together because he completes tasks and quests for the gods. However, that does not stop her from helping Percy. With his father, the Greek god, it is different. Percy strives to get his approval and live up to his expectations. Percy's and other half-bloods' family stories recall Grenby's claim that "the paradox of the family story genre is that it probably includes more



accounts of family disordering than family coherence” (Grenby, 2008, p. 118-119). The approval Percy wants very much comes when he shows heroism, bravery and cleverness. This Percy is different from the one the reader meets at the beginning of the story. He was a twelve-year-old boy who was simply disobedient, scared about his future and in need of a friend, but gradually, through the process of maturation, became wiser, braver and more confident. This is the quality of a novel of personal development also known as Bildungsroman.

### 3 The school story

School as an institution is, together with family, an important part of a child's world. Its job is to prepare one for life, to teach how to overcome certain obstacles and difficulties, and to raise one to become a good person. A school is a place that starts the important process of transition from the closed system of families or smaller groups in kindergartens to the bigger and different daily rhythms, ways of playing, learning, interacting, and to the overall shaping of a child's identity and role (Višnjić Jevtić, 2021). Considering this statement and the importance of school it presents, it is only to be expected that this institution would be amongst the favourite settings for works of fiction, especially the boarding school where children are completely removed from the family context. Riordan's series of novels includes school and life in that miniature society.

A school story is a narrative "in which the school features almost as a character itself, and in which children fit happily into their school, each helping to form the character of the other" (Grenby, 2008, p. 87). *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1875) written by Thomas Hughes established the norms for the said genre. According to Beverly Lyon Clark (1995), *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is a story that is "considered 'the' school story", and is a prototype setting the example many authors choose to follow. A traditional school story, for example the mentioned *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, is set in a boarding school, specifically, in a public school for boys. The readers meet a character who, upon arriving at the school, meets older boys, admires them, fights the bully, and is blamed for things done by others. Competition is constant, in terms of either sports or the aforementioned fight with the bullies. Traditionally, according to Grenby (2008), most schools in Britain were single-sex, thus boys' and girls' school stories were separate as is also seen in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, whereas in recent, modern times they merge and become one as in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels (1997-2007), or Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009).

It is noticed in the wide variety of exemplary works, that stories set in schools are a tradition that dates many years back. By observing the tradition, Grenby derives the basic components of a school story. "It is set almost entirely in school; it takes the relationships between the scholars and their teachers as its primary focus; and it contains attitudes and adventures which are unique to school life" (Grenby, 2008, p. 90). These basic components of the school story genre, except the setting being almost entirely in school, are visible in Rick Riordan's series. Reading about Percy, the main protagonist of the novels, and looking at his school life the

reader is introduced to two school systems, one more important than the other. Before finding out he was a child with one mortal and one Greek god parent, a demigod, Percy was expelled from six regular schools because of his troubling behaviour, regular fighting, and bad academic scores. While reading about his life in those “normal”, realistic schools the reader does not meet the description of actual schoolwork that much (Nikolajeva, 2005). This shows that the basic components of the school story genre are not recognizable in this school system as are in the school setting that is important and provides context for the bigger part of the narrative – the demigod Camp Half-Blood. Having found out he is a demigod, Percy enrolls a camp for people of his kind. Here one can notice the relationships between the students and their teachers, and adventures unique for that school and its students. The readers see how the school system in the camp works, what the children learn, and how they spend their days.

The aforementioned relationships between the students and their teachers, proposed as one of the basic components of the school story genre, are a big part of the novels in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series. According to Grenby (2008), in many school stories, the headmaster is a representation of god. What can be considered interesting is that, in Riordan’s series, the headmaster whom Percy offended right at the beginning, is actually a god, to be specific, the Greek god Dionysius. He and Percy have an evident rocky start and throughout the novels, Percy chooses to be disobedient rather than compliant. Several times this disobedience means that Percy and his friends “face expulsion from the school, their paradise” (Grenby, 2008, p. 97). However, this rule-breaking pattern is what makes the narrative, and is an important part of the novels. The first novel shows Percy who goes through the process of adjustment to the truth about his parentage and the life at Camp Half-Blood, while trying to live up to the expectations of his teachers, mentors, and peers. Upon meeting his supervisors and teachers, all being Greek mythology beings, he cannot hide his disbelief in their existence and says, to his headmaster, that they are “myths, to explain lightning and the seasons and stuff. They’re what people believed before there was science” (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, pp. 67-68). This starts their difficult relationship, and the headmaster’s negative feelings towards Percy. But in spite of that, the relationship between the teachers and their students, mainly Percy, changes as the story progresses and as Percy matures and integrates into the school.

Grenby claims that “a great many school stories deal directly with the gradual integration of new pupils into the school community” (Grenby, 2008, p. 92). This aspect of school life is a big part of “adventures which are unique to school life” (Grenby, 2008, p. 90). Gradual

integration of a newcomer into a school and finding friends is an adventure most school story protagonists go through. Some school stories, for example the *Harry Potter* series, focus on the adjustment and integration of a group of pupils into the school community. However, according to Grenby, most school stories focus on the integration of only one person. An exemplary work would be Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series. The adjustment to the life at Camp Half-Blood which Percy goes through confirms Grenby's claim that the integration of pupils is a recurring theme in the school story genre. Closely connected with the integration of pupils is the motif of forming friendships. Grenby claims, "it is not difficult to see why this process of friend-gathering is so central to many school stories. First, it provides a frame for the narrative. Second, it was often designed to reassure nervous pupils that they would soon find friends" (Grenby, 2008, p. 92). Upon coming to the camp, Percy has only one friend. He is confused and longs for friendship. In the novels, Percy occasionally meets people who become his best friends, but also his enemies. Among his best friends, who will accompany him in all adventures, are the satyr Grover and the demigod Annabeth, a daughter of the goddess Athena. Her and Percy's friendship is unique and not approved by their parents the Greek gods, because Poseidon and Athena have a history of rivalry. However, Percy and Annabeth do not conform to their parent's wishes and stay friends. By becoming fearless, but staying unselfish in his wishes, and balancing his sense of self and of the community he belongs to (cf. Grenby, 2008, p. 93), Percy gains many more friends, some powerful and some less powerful. Friendship is not all Percy gains by enrolling in the camp and adapting to the new lifestyle. He has rivals as most boys or girls in school stories do. In the series about Percy, rivalry is shown in competitions held in the camp, fighting for a good reputation among the gods or in solving the quest faster and more skilfully.

The structure of Camp Half-Blood is reminiscent of the structure of a boarding school, a place where children both live and receive education. Boarding schools are, according to Grenby (2008), authoritarian places focusing on discipline and rules, but places that give freedom to their attendants. However, the school Percy attends is not a typical American school with exams at the end of the year. It does not have a normal school curriculum, graduation day, or exams. What it does offer is the opportunity for the demigods to learn how to swordfight, ride horses, shoot arrows, or learn the Greek language, the knowledge of which is something innate for every half-blood. The attendants receive education in fighting and, most importantly, being a hero. They live in the premises of the camp during the summer months and go to "normal" schools during the rest of the year. Percy and other demigods from the camp are not allowed to

leave the camp unless they have been ordered to do so or a quest is given to them, which happens very often for Percy and his closest friends. This prohibition is a representation of the kind of authority established in the camp. Teachers, that is Greek gods, build their authority through rules the pupils have to abide, and tasks they have to do. The rules the students follow vary from throwing a small portion of their food into the fire as a sacrifice to the gods to help them fight each other in arenas. Their rooms need to be clean, and the owner of the most untidy room has to wash the dishes and do camp-chores all the week. But, despite that, the camp offers demigods the freedom to be themselves and practice their skills. The camp is, as Percy states very often, his “favorite place in the world“ (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters*, 2013, p. 4). It is a place Grenby (2008) described in the statement that boarding schools give freedom to their pupils.

As mentioned above, Grenby claims that school stories primarily focus on the relationships between students and their teachers in the unique context of school life (2008: 90). Riordan’s *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series incorporates the school story genre because it fits the description of a story in which child protagonists happily adopt school, although it does not match all the characteristics Grenby proposes. It is not set almost entirely in school, since the protagonists leave the school to go on quests. Nevertheless, the series has many components that constitute a school story, such as forming friendships, obedience or disobedience to the schools’ headmaster and teachers, and adjustment of an individual to an already existing community.

#### 4 The family story

As Fisher states in relation to family connections, “relationships of warmth and friendship, companionship and independence are highly valued by psychologists as influences on child behavior and personality. Children themselves desire relationships of this kind with their parents” (Fisher, 1950, p. 516). Because children rely on people around them from the moment they are born and continue to need care and attention in their development, family members or caregivers are naturally a big part of children’s stories. Stories depicting family life, its diversity, or absence, belong to the family story genre. Brian Atterby defines the family story as a “work with a collective hero, focusing on a family’s continual adaptation to internal changes and external circumstances” (Atterby, 2009, p. 115). Riordan’s *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) series of novels is a family story in some respects. It depicts what is essentially an unconventional family, consisting of Percy, his mother, and stepfather, who experience hardships. Additionally, there is Percy’s absent Greek god father, who suddenly becomes involved in Percy’s life. This change initiates the adaptation of Percy’s family to new circumstances.

A family story is a narrative designed to show family life and family relationships. The traditional family story sticks to traditional family values and the goal is to make the family relations function well. However, as is frequently the case in children’s literature, families are usually not depicted as complete or conventional. As Grenby claims, “the paradox of the family story genre is that it probably includes more accounts of family disordering than family coherence” (Grenby, 2008, p. 118 – 119). This paradox of the family story is manifested in Rick Riordan’s series of novels about Percy Jackson. Percy lives with his mother and stepfather, whom he calls “Smelly Gabe” (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, p. 30) and with whom he has a troublesome relationship. Percy uses this derogatory name because Gabe is not a father figure the young boy would like to have, and because, as he puts it, Smelly Gabe does in fact have an unpleasant smell. He is an obnoxious gambler who likes to take Percy’s money and waste it on poker. He is verbally abusive to both Percy and his mother and does not show any respect for her. In Riordan’s novels, the character of Smelly Gabe is the one who makes Percy’s family even more unconventional. In absence of a biological father, Gabe is supposed to help Percy’s mother raise the child, but does the opposite by making it more difficult. He is not physically abusive but has an authoritarian attitude towards Percy and his mother.

However, Percy's relationship with his mother is of a different kind. He describes her as being "the best person in the world", adding that "the best people have the rottenest luck" (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, p. 29). Her life was unfortunate because her parents passed away when she was young, and after a series of sad events, she had to quit university. The only thing Percy considers fortunate in her life is the relationship with his biological father, whom he has never met. He portrays the situation by stating that he does not "have any memories of him, just this sort of warm glow, maybe the barest trace of his smile. My mom doesn't like to talk about him because it makes her sad" (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, p. 30). Percy's biological father is said to be lost at sea but it is eventually revealed that he is in fact the Greek god Poseidon. The incompetence Smelly Gabe shows as a parental figure is later diminished as Percy meets Poseidon and gains his respect, and as Percy's mother finds a new partner whom Percy loves. Therefore, as indicated by the relations between members of Percy's family, this is not a conventional and happy family. Riordan's books are instead focused on "social problems, including dysfunctional, broken, and abusive families" (Atterby, 2009, p. 121).

Atterby states that books depicting dysfunctional families often represent "happy families, even when one or more parent is temporarily missing or incompetent" (Atterby, 2009, p. 123). Percy Jackson is an only child. Despite missing his biological father and having an incompetent person in his place, Percy considers himself to be happy. The reason for that is his mother and her love. Once he realizes he is a half-blood, a demigod, he and his mother go on their first quest – taking Percy and his friend Grover to Camp Half-Blood. Upon arriving at the camp and discovering his true heritage, Percy and his mother stop spending time together. Percy spends each summer in the camp and embarks on quests, which leaves no time for visiting his mother. Even though they do not see each other that often, their love does not change. Percy honours his mother for her bravery and selflessness, and his mother is proud of Percy and his accomplishments in the quests assigned by the gods. She is afraid for him and often helps him in the quests. Percy's mother is an important character in the novels, and comes to represent the parental figure that brings a feeling which "relationships of warmth and friendship" (Fisher, 1950, p. 516) give and which are known to be stimulating for children. She supports Percy but most of all, she protects him from different dangers he faces. She suffers for Percy by marrying Smelly Gabe to hide Percy's half-blood smell from the monsters that would otherwise be attracted to it. She is aware of Percy's heritage but hides it from him until he is old enough to understand it and protect himself. Even though Percy's love for his mother is shown in the

novels in numerous places, it is indicated that Percy is still an adolescent boy who cannot hide his annoyance at times: “I hoped I wasn’t blushing. It was bad enough I had to depend on my mom to drive me to my battles. [...] If my mom told one more story about how cute I looked in the bath when I was three years old, I was going to burrow into the snow and freeze myself to death” (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Titan's Curse*, 2013, p. 2). Grenby states that mothers in the nineteenth and twentieth century family stories “have a constricting effect on the plot and on the children’s activities; their love is so embarrassingly obvious that it can’t be overlooked, it stands in the way of that independence that children like to imagine” (Grenby, 2008, p. 119). Because Percy’s family “values its members for different strengths and validates their separate interests, and [...] has learned to meet problems as challenges” (Atterby, 2009, p. 124), it is a happy family, despite the absence of one parent.

The absence of one or more parents is said “to endorse the importance of family. Very many family stories begin with a sundering but proceed to show how the protagonists continually strive to regenerate their family in revised forms” (Grenby, 2008, p. 119). The revised forms of families could be children recreating a family structure, like in Fredrick Marryat’s *Children of the New Forest* (1847) where the eldest two siblings act like mother and father, while the two younger children act like their children. To an extent, another regenerated family emerges in Riordan’s series of novels. The protagonists do not recreate a family structure but rather find a substitute for a family in friendship. Among his friends from the camp, Percy discovers brothers and sisters he did not have. Some of them are real, like his half-brother Tyson, a cyclops who is Poseidon’s son and therefore Percy’s half-brother, whereas most of the new friends are not his real siblings. His friends Grover and Annabeth follow him throughout his quests and help him. Additionally, Percy’s family is one of the rare ones among the pupils of the camp that depicts a somewhat supportive relationship among the family members. Riordan’s novels are populated by many sad and frustrated teenagers who do not receive the love and attention they expect from their parents because Greek gods have many children and cannot spend time with all of them: “‘The gods are busy. They have a lot of kids and don’t always...Well, sometimes they don’t care about us, Percy. They ignore us.’ I thought about some of the kids I’d seen in the Hermes cabin, teenagers who looked sullen and depressed, as if they were waiting for a call that would never come” (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, p. 96). Even so, Grenby (2008) claims that the absence of happiness, which is also shown in these novels, as is the unconventionality of the families of Percy’s contemporaries, is a device that advocates



the importance of family rather than minimizing it. The protagonists of the novels choose to restore their families in new forms by regarding friends as family.

Atterby (2009) places stories about family life and family adaptation to certain events and circumstances into the category of the family story genre. Additionally, Grenby (2008) claims that “given the place that children have occupied in society, probably the majority of children’s fiction has been set within the family” (Grenby, 2008, p. 117). As shown above, Riordan’s series fits into this genre. Firstly, family stories, as pointed out by Grenby, depict lives of happy families but are more often about disorder or dysfunction and the reconstruction of the family. Family stories show children who strive to have normal, ideal families but oftentimes end in different situations in which they have to cope in various ways. Riordan’s series fits into Grenby’s description of the family story paradox – the fact that such stories mostly represent dysfunctionality – since Percy’s father leaves him and his mother, and an abusive stepfather enters their lives. Secondly, as emphasized by Atterby, even dysfunctional families often represent “happy families, even when one or more parent is temporarily missing or incompetent” (Atterby, 2009, p. 123). This characteristic of the genre is manifested in Riordan’s series. The main protagonist is happy to have his caring and loving mother, which manages to diminish the bad influence of his stepfather. Lastly, the absence of the family structure makes children protagonists of the novels “regenerate their family in revised forms” (Grenby, 2008, p. 119), which is achieved by Percy and the children from the camp when they become so close that they begin to regard each other as family. Considering all of the above, the novels about Percy Jackson do not fit a classic family story but do contain several aspects of that genre that play important parts in the development of the main character and his relationships, both with his biological family and his new-found “family” of friends.

## 5 Bildungsroman

Writing about Astrid Lindgren's novel *Ronia, the Robber's Daughter* (1980), Maria Nikolajeva states that "it is a Bildungsroman as well, [...] about a young person's breaking away from home, her wandering, trials and final maturation" (Nikolajeva, 1996, p. 8). A Bildungsroman, as the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) dictionary explains, is a novel that is concerned with a person's formative years and development. It details the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist. As Roberta Seeilnger Trites claims (2014), the Bildungsroman is focused on the interior or spiritual growth of a character, which involves leaving the adolescent stage and, consequently, maturation into adulthood. This genre takes the growth as an end goal and, when looking at Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) series of novels, some of the aforementioned characteristics of the Bildungsroman can be discerned.

In relation to a character's formative years and development, adolescence "is usually thought of as a period during which the notions of selfhood undergo rapid and radical transformation" (Trites, 2014, p. 12). Trites explains that the transformation of self-perception is formed in communication with society, and with other people. In the aforementioned series of novels, Percy starts his process of development at the beginning of the story. He is a young man who has been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and with dyslexia. Because of the problems he unintentionally causes, he has already been expelled from six schools at the start of the first novel. As the story progresses, Percy is introduced as a character whose disabilities and family difficulties have led to a negative self-image. He is in need of acceptance and true friendship. Upon discovering his identity, he starts the process of redefining himself. Once Percy enters the camp for half-bloods and realises he is a child of Poseidon, he has to put aside his grudge towards his father who abandoned him and his mother, and accept what comes with the position he is in. He suddenly becomes important, and many characters, both evil and just, want him in their service. Communication with people similar to him, as well as being wanted and praised by others, helps the transformation of Percy's self-perception. Since the beginning of the first novel, he shows a strong sense of justice and loyalty. However, the sudden change in the course of his life takes him on the quest of staying true to himself and to the values he had before enrolling in the camp, as well as deciding which path to take and to whom he should remain loyal. He has to undergo a process of maturation, which "means preserving and strengthening an integrity already there in childhood" (Meek & Watson, 2002, p. 9).

However, what Meek and Watson claim about *The Ship that Flew* (1939) by Hilda Lewis, is that it “is not what we usually think of as a maturation novel: that is to say, maturation is not a theme that the narrative seems especially or explicitly interested in. But it does tell [...] how the children grow wiser, braver and more generous as time passes” (Meek & Watson, 2002, p. 1). The same can be said about the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* novels. Maturation as a theme does not drive the narrative, but is instead embedded into the quests and adventures Percy faces. Percy grows wiser and braver, and he is more aware of the consequences his and other people’s actions cause. Throughout the books, Percy acquires a set of values important in the new world he has entered – a world of half-bloods, Greek gods, and monsters. Bravery and cunning are important to be successful and to survive the quests, but generosity is important for receiving praise and finding friendship. At the beginning of the novel, Percy’s only friend is Grover, the satyr. Percy and Annabeth, the girl from the camp who only cooperates with Percy on their quests, share a relationship full of childish bickering, which evolves into real friendship as they both mature. Annabeth becomes one of Percy’s best friends and, later on, his girlfriend. As they grow more mature, the characters in the novels find real friendship among people of both sexes. Even though Percy shows signs of personal growth, he is, at the end of the last novel, sixteen years old, which means he did not yet reach the stage of adulthood. This is a contrast to Roberta Trites’ explanation that the Bildungsroman shows leaving the adolescent stage and entering adulthood.

Bildungsroman, as a novel of personal development, depicts “a period during which the notions of selfhood undergo rapid and radical transformation” (Trites, 2014, p. 12), showing the process of “maturation into adulthood” (Trites, 2014, p. 13). When considering these two characteristics in Rick Riordan’s series of novels, it is apparent that it does not include the latter. Percy is an adolescent at the beginning of the story as well as at its ending. He does not go through a transition to the adult stage. However, he does go through the process of both psychological and moral growth. From being self-conscious and having a negative self-image, he becomes a brave, generous, and self-confident young adult who is highly acclaimed in the world of half-bloods.

## 6 Myth

The Merriam-Webster (n.d.) dictionary defines the myth as a traditional story of historical events that serves to describe a part of the world view of people. Andrew Von Hendy (2001) claims that the modern world inherited the word and the concept of myths from ancient Greece. He suggests that the Greeks had a very rich tradition of oral storytelling upon which Homer and Hesiod built their great hexameter poems. Swanson (2014) claims the two were the first ones who wrote down the mythology of their religion. Their writings were not new stories to the Greeks but were told in a way that influenced people to share, and eventually read them. Additionally, Hendy mentions that the word *myth* “appears to signify merely ‘traditional story’” (Hendy, 2001, p. 1). The aforementioned claims are in accordance with the explanation given by the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Although the word “myth” is often used to describe traditional stories, it also connotes “a religious dimension to a story” (Hendy, 2001, p. 3). Maria Nikolajeva mentions this religious dimension of myths as well and states that “myths are sacred stories that, unlike folktales, are based on belief” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 53). Swanson (2014) notices that ancient Greek mythology has been repeatedly adapted because of its cultural relevance. This adaptation of mythology is noticeable in Riordan’s *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) series of novels, in which mythological characters and objects are inserted into the modern world. However, Riordan changes the plots of the myths by reshaping them and embedding them into new settings. He omits the sacred meaning of myths, mentioned by Nikolajeva, by retelling them “for the entertainment of young readers” (Nikolajeva, 2005, p. 53).

Brian Atterby (2014) gives an account of retelling myths for the entertainment of young readers and claims that authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) did not completely falsify the original myths but made them accessible to children and acceptable to parents and teachers. Hawthorne’s versions of myths “recast them as fairy tales: giving them child protagonists, bowdlerizing sexual content, and making the gods into fairy godparents” (Atterby, 2014, p. 13). Riordan embeds the myths into the modern world, and by adding new characters like Percy and Annabeth, he tells new stories with mythical elements. He shapes his novels “by telling the story through the eyes of one hero, Percy, which is very different than the ancient poems” (Swanson, 2014, p. 21). Consequently, the plots of the myths are changed. Nonetheless, Riordan does not change all mythological material completely. Swanson (2014) mentions instances when it seems as if Riordan depicted gods with their Iliadic personalities and moves on to give an example of Hephaestus being uninterested in the mortal

realm but concerned with his family. What is considered Riordan's advantage is "not being limited by poetic form, which means he can give straightforward descriptions of the gods and their intentions" (Swanson, 2014, p. 21). He draws inspiration from myths, but uses their material freely, transforming it into his series of novels. An example of using the material freely is found in Percy's namesake – the Greek hero Perseus. Riordan gives Percy some of Perseus's qualities and evokes some of his achievements, such as killing the Medusa or threatening to take the Gray Sisters' eye. Whereas the Greek hero is Zeus's son, Percy's father is Poseidon. When reading about gods and the disguises they appear in, Swanson (2014) notices that Riordan's Poseidon is often described in beachwear, Hermes as the messenger always holds his cell phone, while Ares's eyes are endless pits, which he covers with sunglasses.

Myths are described as "specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances" (Bolle, Buxton, & Smith, myth, 2020). Riordan's series of novels includes all of the above. There are gods, heroes, and demigods who have supernatural abilities, and who find themselves in peculiar situations. For example, Percy, as Poseidon's son, breathes underwater, controls water and talks with horses and fish. Annabeth, being Athena's daughter, is stronger than other demigods and is very wise. There are other heroes, each with a special set of abilities inherited from their immortal parent. The heroes in the series communicate with the gods. However, their relationships are different from those in Homer's or Hesiod's poems. As Swanson explains, "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, the young are our future, which is very applicable to Riordan's gods" (Swanson, 2014, pp. 22-23). Gods need the help of heroes and rely on characters like Percy and Annabeth in the battles they fight. Even though Riordan's gods are not parental figures who would guide and help their children, they are represented as participating more in their children's lives than their ancient counterparts from Homer and Hesiod. Additionally, Riordan's demigods are free to do things they want to do, whereas the heroes of antiquity were dependent upon gods. On the one hand, "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" (Swanson, 2014, p. 24). On the other hand, Percy gets Athena's advice but is free to do what he pleases.

Vanessa Nikolovska claims that "glory is clearly a major theme in Homer's poems. In a warrior-society such as that of Greece and Troy that flourished around 3,200 years ago, a requirement

of heroes was that they must earn glory for their country” (Nikolovska, 2015, p. 3). Swanson (2014) reflects on ancient heroes and warriors, stating they are not a singular group but rather people being coerced to fight together. They are interested in individual glory more than in cooperation. On the other hand, Percy and many of the other characters from the series are cooperating in a fight against evil. They are conscious of their actions and notice how they can influence others. This makes them unlike “legendary heroes such as Theseus, who undertook the adventure of the Minotaur largely for the glory of the deed, and all his subsequent behavior abandoning Ariadne, carelessly causing his father’s death – reflects the self-centeredness of the typical hero” (Stephens & McCallum, 1998, p. 85). Thalia Grace, the daughter of Zeus, for example, is an example of a selfless hero. She confronted the monsters on the edge of Camp Half-Blood to save her friends Luke, Annabeth and Grover. During the fight, she was mortally wounded. Her father Zeus turned her into a pine tree so that he could save her soul from passing into the Underworld. Her pine tree became the Camp’s border and served as protection from monsters and mortals. By sacrificing herself, she saved her three best friends and continued to protect the whole camp and its attendants for years in the form of the pine tree. Moreover, Percy is a hero who “can be championed by all who read” (Swanson, 2014, p. 4). He does not sacrifice himself in a way that Thalia does, by giving her life for her friends, but by staying loyal and kind, fighting for those that are weak and cannot protect themselves. He realises that the problem lies in the irresponsible gods’ behaviour towards their children, and “challenges gods who have done wrongs to their heroes” (Swanson, 2014, p. 4). Throughout the books, Percy becomes aware of the responsibility he has concerning his power and status as the son of Poseidon, but also learns how to be humble in relying on others. For example, there were many opportunities for Percy to gain glory and praise by accomplishing the task all by himself, but by sharing his quests with others, he gives them the chance to be heroes.

Swanson (2014) mentions that Hesiod’s *Theogony* gives an account of the birth of gods and other mythological beings. Hesiod “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” (Swanson, 2014, p. 12). Riordan’s book *Percy Jackson’s Greek Gods* (2014) describes almost all the same events. Both Hesiod and Riordan start with Chaos. They move on to explain the birth of Gaea, Uranus, Pontus, and, later on, the Titans and their children, the Olympians. Both *Theogony* and *Percy Jackson’s Greek Gods* describe Zeus as an important character: “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 who might want to overthrow him” (Swanson, 2014, pp. 13-14). Swanson adds that Hesiod’s Zeus is the one who overthrows the titan Kronos and saves his siblings. The same event is found in Riordan’s account of Zeus’s life. The exception is that the narrator of *Percy Jackson’s Greek Gods*, after describing the creation of gods and the act of overthrowing the Titans, describes the Olympians with “WHY IS ZEUS ALWAYS FIRST? Seriously, every book about the Greek gods has to start with this guy. Are we doing reverse alphabetical order? I know he’s the king of Olympus and all—but trust me, this dude’s ego does *not* need to get any bigger. You know what? Forget him. We’re going to talk about the gods in the order they were born, women first. Take a backseat, Zeus. We’re starting with Hestia” (Riordan, 2014, str. 57). Additionally, according to Swanson (2014), Hesiod finishes his work with the great heroes born from gods and mortals, whereas Riordan only includes the creation of gods.

What Atterby (2014) suggests about Hawthorne’s versions of myths can also be observed in Riordan’s novels. They do use myths as a foundation, yet they do not retell them, but rather allude to their characters and events. As Debra Moddelmog claims, “if myth remains perpetually open to interpretation, then its presence in a work of fiction can always suggest new meaning [*sic*] ” (Moddelmog, 1993, p. 6). Rick Riordan creates new meanings for myths by adding new characters and slightly reshaping some of the already familiar ones, especially the Greek gods. He depicts the gods in a new way, by mocking them and the characteristics they have had since antiquity. He “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 [*sic*] inequalities and not about how the humans treated each other” (Swanson, 2014, p. 49). However, Percy Jackson shows that one can be a hero by letting others show their abilities and gain fame. Debra Moddelmog states that the myth is “fluid, never completed, adapted by successive generations to their religious, cultural and ethical standards” (Moddelmog, 1993, p. 15). This statement is reflected in Riordan’s adaptation of ancient myths to the standards of the modern world. He draws inspiration from myths and refers to them, their characters, figures and objects, while inserting them into the modern world. He transforms the mythological material in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series of novels.

## 7 Fantasy

Concerning the connection between myth and fantasy, Atterby claims that “as different models of myth emerged and were in turn replaced, each left a mark on a generation of poets and fiction writers, so that the entire history of the science of myth can be found reproduced in literary form. Nowhere is this more true than in fantasy literature” (Atterby, 2014, p. 21). Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003) define fantasy as imaginative fiction, which allows people to explore life mysteries while not being bound by size, time or space. It starts from the human need to understand the fight and struggle between good and evil, which all of the ancient mythology reflects as well. Consequently, people still use myth, through fantasy, to deal with “the struggle of good versus evil” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 2). Moreover, “springing from the depths of mythology and the Greek *phantasia* (making visible), fantasy literature represents our personal need and the universal quest for deeper realities and eternal truth” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, pp. 1-2).

According to Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003), for fantasy to be realised in children’s and young adult literature, two conditions must exist – phenomena that do not exist in the real world as it is physically formed and at least one character that is explicitly made as human or human-like, so that the readers can identify and empathize with that character. Examples of unreal phenomena in a work of fiction are “talking dogs, cats, mice, and pigs; sand fairies or, for that matter fairies of any kind; objects that inexplicably transport people through time or over great distances; [...] human beings normal in all respects except for being miniature or gigantic in size” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 6). Riordan’s series of novels includes such phenomena: Greek gods, monsters, and other mythological beings and objects. Percy Jackson lives in a world in which mythology is real and this makes the novels “fiction involving the supernatural or impossible” (Grenby, 2008, p. 145). The things occurring in Percy’s world are, as Grenby (2008) puts it, opposite to ideas humans have of reality. However, fantasy fiction does not involve a complete exclusion of reality. Grenby claims that “the supernatural and the normal exist together in fantasy texts, in various proportions and combinations” (Grenby, 2008, p. 150). Riordan’s stories are supernatural because they include the mythological but are also realistic in their depiction of cities, monuments or the everyday objects and gadgets that Percy and his contemporaries use, like cars or mobile phones.

Riordan’s series also meets the second requirement: a human or human-like character with whom the readers can identify and empathize. Gates, Steffel and Molson describe the need for such a character: “so strong is the reader’s need to identify and empathize that, regardless of



how richly detailed and evocative it may be, an imaginary world invites boredom and eventual rejection unless a human or sufficiently human-like character is also present with which readers, especially young ones, can become involved” (2003, p. 7). Grenby also mentions this need for a character who acts like a representative portraying “the readers and their responses to the strangeness” (Grenby, 2008, p. 151) of the story. He adds that the readers’ representatives in Narnia, the Pevensie siblings, explore the world and guide the readers through it while simultaneously mediating the readers’ encounters with the fantastic. Grenby states that through these human or human-like characters, the readers become accustomed to the weirdness of the fantastic. In *The Hobbit* (1937), Tolkien accustoms the readers to the strangeness of dwarves, dragons and wizards through the surprised and confused character of Bilbo Baggins. Riordan uses Percy to help readers become involved and to mediate their reactions. Percy often describes the strange events happening to him. For example, the period of discovering his identity was troublesome and he reacted to it by saying “I was used to the occasional weird experience, but usually they were over quickly. This twenty-four/seven hallucination was more than I could handle” (Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, 2013, p. 16). Percy gradually realises and accepts the “mysterious occurrences taking place” (Grenby, 2008, p. 151) in his life, and the readers accept the fantastical together with him, identify with his reactions, and empathize with him throughout the story.

Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003), classify fantasy into three categories: fairy or folk tales, mixed fantasy and heroic-ethical fantasy. Nikolajeva (2005) describes folk tales as traditional stories and fairy tales as stories that take place in an indefinite time and that contain magic. Mixed fantasy, according to Gates, Steffel and Molson, combines realism and fantasy, and they divide it into four subcategories: journey fantasy, transformation fantasy, talking animal fantasy and magic fantasy. The final category they mention is heroic-ethical fantasy, which focuses on heroic adventures and deeds. Riordan’s series of novels belongs to the category of mixed fantasy, and, to an extent, to the category of heroic-ethical fantasy. Mixed fantasy is described as “the most common type of children’s fantasy” and it combines fantasy and realism (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 49). Grenby (2008) also mentions the relationship between fantasy and realism, stating that “it is surely not the case that all literature can be placed somewhere on a scale with pure fantasy at one end, and pure mimesis (the representation of reality) at the other” (Grenby, 2008, p. 146). *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* can be considered a mixed fantasy because “everything is realistically rendered” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 55) apart from Greek gods, monsters and mythical objects. According to Gates, Steffel and Molson,

a popular type of mixed fantasy is the narrative that involves a type of journey. It includes characters who “must traverse a certain route, terrain, or distance” (2003, p. 59). In the second novel from Riordan’s series, *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2013), Percy and his friends undergo a journey to the Sea of Monsters to find a magical item that has the power to save Camp Half-Blood. However, the journey is hard not just because of the deadly monsters attacking them and putting them in mortal danger, but because many creatures, like the Sirens, cause them to make significant decisions by showing them their deepest desires and tempting them. One feature of journey fantasy, shown in the second of Riordan’s novels, is that the traveller “may see something distinctive or awesome about the place through which he or she is passing; furthermore, on the way, the traveler is more than likely to undergo a number of experiences, some of which may constitute serious obstacles to the successful conclusion of the journey” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 59).

Gates, Steffel and Molson describe heroic-ethical fantasy by separately defining heroic or high fantasy and ethical fantasy. The former is defined as “an adaptation of traditional heroic or mythic conventions and material that presupposes a world, [...], of heroes and gods and titans” (2003, p. 112), and the latter as fantasy “explicitly concerned with the existence of good and evil and the morality of human behavior” (p. 114). Additionally, the authors make a distinction between high or heroic and low fantasy by stating that “the world of low fantasy is the primary world – this real world we live in. [...] The gods and faeries no longer, alas, walk here. Consequently, when something nonrational occurs, [...], there are no explanations, rational or non-rational” (p. 112). Contrary to low fantasy, one feature of high or heroic fantasy is the existence of a secondary world in which the non-rational is accepted and explainable. The authors propose three ways in which the primary and the secondary worlds relate. According to the first type, the secondary world is introduced at the beginning, and the primary world is ignored completely and is non-existent. This is found in Tolkien’s or Ursula K. LeGuin’s works. According to the second variant, there is “some kind of direct relationship between the two worlds” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 113), while in the third type the secondary world or its power exists within the primary world only at a restricted place. Grenby (2008) does not distinguish between the three ways in which the primary and the secondary worlds relate but, when discussing Alan Garner’s *Elidor* (1965), he does mention that “the ‘real’ world and fantasy world lie on top of each other, touching at certain points” (Grenby, 2008, p. 153).

This can be applied in the analysis of the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series. In his novels, Riordan applied the second variant proposed by Gates, Steffel and Molson. The primary world

in the series consists of the cities in the USA which embraces entrances to the secondary, mythological world in different places. For example, “the entrance to the Underworld of Greek mythology, the Hades, is California, and the Olympus where Zeus dwells is located in New York, on top of Empire State Building” (Mugijatna, Habsari, & Putri, 2014). However, the primary world does not meet the secondary only at these entrance points or portals. The power of the secondary world permeates the primary world as is shown in the appearances of monsters and mythological beings in cities, museums, buses and other places. Moreover, Riordan recasts the Greek mythological characters and makes them “fit into the setting of the novel” (Mugijatna, Habsari, & Putri, 2014, str. 80) by giving Chiron the Centaur a wheelchair to hide his horse legs or beachwear to Poseidon. These are the characteristics of high or heroic fantasy, the first component of heroic-ethical fantasy. The second component of heroic-ethical fantasy, ethical fantasy, is that it focuses on “the difficulty and, sometimes, even the necessity of discerning right from wrong and then acting accordingly” (Gates, Steffel, & Molson, 2003, p. 114). In Riordan’s series of novels, all characters make important decisions and have to choose a side in the ultimate battle in the end. This decision-making process between forces of good and evil are attributes of ethical fantasy.

As Gates, Steffel and Molson state, “fantasy is imaginative fiction that allows us to explore major life mysteries without being limited by size, time, or space” (2003, p. 2). It allows authors to explore issues and struggles in the fight between good and evil. These authors mention that for fantasy to be realised in children’s or young adult literature, two requirements need to be met. The first is the existence of the unreal phenomenon and the second one is that there needs to be at least one human or human-like character with which the readers can identify. Riordan’s series meets the two requirements. Unreal phenomena are represented by Greek mythological characters inserted into the modern-day USA, and Percy is the human character with whom the readers identify, and who, according to Grenby (2008), helps the readers mediate their reactions to the strange events. Gates, Steffel and Molson propose three categories of fantasy – folk or fairy tales, mixed fantasy and heroic-ethical fantasy. *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series belongs to the second and third categories. The category of mixed fantasy, more specifically journey fantasy, is manifested in almost all of the books from the series but is more pronounced in the second novel, *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* (2013), in which Percy goes on a voyage to the Sea of Monsters to save Camp Half-Blood from the Titan Kronos’ army by bringing the Golden Fleece. Even though it is hard to establish whether Riordan’s work belongs to low or high fantasy (and many authors give different definitions of the two types), our

analysis has shown that the series belongs to the heroic-ethical fantasy if we take into account the definition given by Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003). They claim that heroic or high fantasy has three variations, and the characteristics of the second variation are present in Riordan's series. Works belonging to the second type of heroic-ethical fantasy are works in which there is a relationship between the primary and the secondary world. This is visible in the entanglement of the secondary, mythological world with the primary world, the cities of modern-day USA. Additionally, mythological beings appear in the USA and therefore, according to Grenby's criteria (2008), the real and the fantasy world touch and intertwine.

## 8 The adventure story

Joyce G. Saricks (2009) defines adventure fiction by citing John G. Cawelti, who claims that the adventure story is the story “of the hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission” (Saricks, 2009, p. 15). She adds that the adventure story’s pattern is of archetypal nature, which can be found even in ancient myths and epics, and moves on to explain that the hero of traditional adventure stories goes through perils to reach a certain goal. Therefore, “novels in the Adventure genre are action-packed, feature a hero on a mission, and are often set in exotic locales during times of war or peace” (Saricks, 2009, p. 16). However, Grenby (2008) claims that “few texts can be regarded as *only* adventure” (Grenby, 2008, p. 172) but are rather a blend of the adventure story and other genres like the family story in Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), or fantasy, myth, the family story, the school story and Bildungsroman in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009).

Gary Hoppenstand (2018) states that “many other genres of popular fiction emphasize adventure as an important dimension of their formulas” (Hoppenstand, 2018, p. 3). However, when looking at the adventure story as a genre, Hoppenstand, as well as Saricks (2009), points out its several pronounced qualities. Among these, the most prominent is adventure itself, which can be attributed to what Saricks (2009) says about the story line being focused on action, most often a mission, and the dangers and obstacles the protagonist meets. As Saricks claims, “the plot usually concentrates on a desperate mission” (Saricks, 2009, p. 17) and is always life threatening to those included. *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* novels include mission and action. Each novel from the series starts with an introduction to a quest Percy and his friends need to accomplish. In the first novel it is the search for Zeus’s Master Bolt, and in the second the search for the Golden Fleece and the rescue of Grover. However, the ultimate mission is defeating the titan Kronos, his army of titans, monsters and half-bloods, and saving Olympus, which represents the “one overwhelming obstacle that must be overcome, although there are often lesser difficulties along the way” (Saricks, 2009, p. 17). Concerning the story line, Saricks mentions the survival in human, physical and animal dangers or escape from perilous situations. As for human dangers in Riordan’s series, Percy and his friends often meet people whom they have to fight, either in games organised in the camp or in real battles. However, physical fighting is not the only danger they face. They have to outsmart treacherous half-bloods or think of ways to defeat monsters. For example, when fighting Medusa, Percy, Annabeth and Grover have to be careful not to look directly into her eyes. When they come to Circe’s island, Annabeth

needs to recognise her in order to realise that they have to escape. Moreover, Saricks mentions that “despite the danger and the obstacles, the hero is successful” (Saricks, 2009, p. 18), which is also true in the case of Riordan’s series. Percy and his closest friends always accomplish their task. However, Saricks states that even though the hero is successful, other characters can perish during a mission. Charles Beckendorf and Bianca di Angelo are two secondary characters who die and sacrifice themselves to help the heroes triumph in the series' third and last novel.

According to Saricks (2009), one aspect of the adventure story genre is the characterisation of the hero as strong, honourable and completely engaged in his or her mission. Hoppenstand (2018) also mentions the characterisation of the protagonist and states that “the single defining element of all the great adventure heroes [...] is their ability to conquer their adversaries or prevail over a hostile environment” (Hoppenstand, 2018, p. 3). Percy Jackson matches such definitions. He is strong and engaged in the missions appointed to him but is honourable in his actions. He conquers his enemies and accomplishes all of his quests. Saricks claims that, for a protagonist to be a hero, “both physical and intellectual skills are required: the hero must act to accomplish his mission, but he must also be able to figure out the puzzles along the way (Saricks, 2009, p. 18). She adds that these heroes are not necessarily the leaders of the groups they belong to but are contributing greatly to the mission because of their skill. Percy Jackson’s group of friends has no single leader ruling over the others. Each of them contributes in some way to the accomplishment of the mission, whether by being smart, strong or skilful in making weapons or talking to animals. However, the main characters from Riordan’s novels are not what Saricks claims to be stereotypes but are rather characters with a deeper characterization. Saricks states that “some authors do shade their characters, making them grayer and adding the depth of characterization” (2009, p. 19). This can be noticed in Riordan’s characters. For example, Annabeth’s flaw is pride, which she shows by thinking she is smarter than most people. Percy’s flaw is extreme loyalty, which often puts him and his friends in danger.

Grenby (2008) points out that “the children’s adventure story typically takes for its protagonists figures who are unimportant in their normal lives. They are usually on the margins of the community, neglected and often victimised” (Grenby, 2008, p. 173). At the beginning of the novels, Percy is an insignificant character struggling with self-image and gaining friends. The change in Percy’s self-image happens when the narrative places him “right at the centre of important events” (Grenby, 2008, p. 174), great dangers, and big decisions. Percy suddenly realises he is the son of a Greek god and, by accomplishing his first quest, he becomes popular among half-bloods. This can be connected to Grenby’s statement that “the adventure story is a

fantasy of empowerment” (Grenby, 2008, p. 174), which makes the unimportant characters become of the greatest importance.

Saricks (2009) mentions the role physical setting has in adventure stories. She considers the setting important because “heroes must go on a mission to another place, often exotic or unknown and certainly mysterious” (Saricks, 2009, p. 20). The stories are often set in foreign countries, and, according to Saricks, this foreignness gives the sense of danger and difficulties that need to be overcome. Grenby (2008) also mentions the setting of adventure stories, stating that “most classic adventure stories share an exotic setting” (Grenby, 2008, p. 181). Hoppenstand (2018) claims that “a number of the various types of popular fiction that can be collected under the general heading of the adventure story are set in foreign lands of exotic locales” (Hoppenstand, 2018, p. 3). This claim supports the placement of Riordan’s *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series into the category of adventure story. Percy Jackson is from America, more specifically from Queens in New York. After realising he is a half-blood and a Greek god’s son, he enrolls in a camp for half-bloods. The boundaries of the camp are enchanted and protect the campers from monsters or normal people. Because of the magical boundaries, the camp is not visible to mortals, and monsters can enter it only if summoned. If a student from the camp is given a quest, he or she leaves the camp to accomplish it. Percy and his friends often go on quests, visiting seemingly normal places like Los Angeles or New York. However, the locations like Los Angeles or buildings like the Empire State Building in New York are entrances to mythological places like the Underworld or Mount Olympus. On the first quest, Percy, Annabeth and Grover visit Auntie Em’s Garden Gnome Emporium and soon realise that it is actually the Medusa’s shop. Throughout the series, Percy and his friends visit the Sea of Monsters, Calypso’s island Ogygia and Daedalus’ Labyrinth. In these places they have to overcome many obstacles like solving the Sphinx’ riddle or running away from the cyclops Polyphemus. In relation to the obstacles the heroes face in the exotic places, Hoppenstand states that “the heroes of these stories, [...], often engage in hostilities with the native peoples of these foreign lands, frequently either subjugating them or killing them” (2018, p. 3). This is seen in Percy’s triumph over all obstacles he faces in the hostile places he visits.

Saricks (2009) points out that the pacing of the adventure genre is brisk, saying that “the action moves the story along at a breakneck speed, with the hero and his crew escaping from one dangerous situation to the next” (Saricks, 2009, p. 17). Moreover, she explains that because of the urgency of the mission assigned to a hero the pace needs to be quick. The pacing of Riordan’s novels is fast. The quests assigned to Percy are urgent and require immediate

reaction. For example, in the first novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, Percy is given a quest soon after his arrival in the camp, even though he does not have enough training or skill.

When writing about the adventure story genre, Grenby (2008) states that few texts can be recognized as solely adventure stories. Most adventure stories are the stories “of the hero – individual or group – overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission” (Saricks, 2009, p. 15), and are what “provides the frame” (Grenby, 2008, p. 172) for other genres like fantasy. Saricks (2009) claims that any fantasy novel with a quest needs a large amount of action, adding that “this genre shares the same genre-crossing tendencies that all others seem to have adopted, spilling over into” (Saricks, 2009, p. 31) other genres. She also mentions the characteristics of the adventure story genre including the action-oriented story line, the positive characterization of the hero, the important role of physical setting, and the brisk pacing. When writing about the protagonist of the adventure story, Grenby adds that the protagonist is often an unimportant person who suddenly becomes known to others because he or she is placed in the centre of action. All of the characteristics mentioned by Grenby and Saricks are present in Riordan’s *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series. They are action-oriented and revolve around a quest assigned to the hero. The quest is often perilous and Percy is characterized as brave and selfless, which supports Saricks’ claim that the hero of the adventure story is required to be strong and righteous. However, Grenby’s description of the protagonist also fits Percy’s characterization. At the beginning of the first novel, Percy is described as a person who is in need of friendship and respect. Upon realising he is a half-blood, and Poseidon’s son, he becomes important and a true hero. Another important attribute of the adventure story is the importance of the setting, which is almost always exotic and “unknown and certainly mysterious” (Saricks, 2009, p. 20). Riordan’s novels take the reader to places like Mount Olympus, the Underworld or the Sea of Monsters, and those places are what Hoppenstand (2018) describes as foreign and hostile. The last feature noticeable in Riordan’s work is brisk pacing of the narrative which “is of primary importance in adventure stories” (McElmeel, 1995, p. 96).



## 9 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to identify which genres Rick Riordan's series *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* (2005-2009) incorporates, and to analyse the novels in the context of these genres. The series belongs to children's literature, a broad category, which, according to Nikolajeva (2005), consists of many genres.

The *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* novels combine elements of the following genres: the school story, the family story, Bildungsroman, myth, fantasy and the adventure story. The school story, the family story and Bildungsroman, although important, are not as represented as fantasy, myth and the adventure story.

The school story is a genre that focuses on children's lives in the context of a school. Grenby (2008) proposes that a school story is a narrative driven by situations and occurrences specific for school societies, and that it describes the relationship between pupils (students) and teachers, being set entirely in a school. The novels in Riordan's series are not set entirely in a school, but depict situations and adventures specific for school life, as well as relationships between students and teachers.

The family story is a genre that focuses on relationships, situations and details of family life. Grenby (2008) mentions that stories about family life show dysfunctional families more often than conventional, functioning families, and that children strive to recreate the family in new forms. Moreover, Atterby (2009) claims that dysfunctional families can still be happy families even if one or both parents are incompetent. Riordan's series has strong connections with the family story genre, but it offers a representation of a complex family: dysfunctional, since Percy has an absent father and an abusive stepfather, but also supportive, because he has a loving mother, and because his friends represent another, harmonious family.

Bildungsroman is a genre that focuses on personal growth and development of a protagonist. It shows the maturation, transformation and, as Trites (2014) claims, entrance into adulthood. In *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series, the entrance into adulthood is not discerned. Percy is an adolescent in the beginning and stays one until the end of the series. However, he does go through a process of psychological and moral development from a self-conscious to a confident and brave character.

Myths are traditional stories that describe a part of the view and belief of a group of people. They have been repeatedly adapted and retold because of their relevance. Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* is an example of adaptation of myths. Riordan added new characters

or gave new characteristics to the ones already present in myths, such as the Greek gods. Additionally, he adapted the myths to the modern world while adding a specific moral dimension, which is not present in myths from antiquity.

Fantasy is a genre that allows authors to analyse and write about life issues and struggles. It is a genre closely connected with myth. Atterby (2014) states that myth is reproduced in literary form to describe the battle between good and evil, which is manifested in fantasy literature. Among many categories of fantasy literature proposed by Gates, Steffel and Molson (2003), Riordan's five-series novels belongs to the category of mixed fantasy, in particular to journey fantasy, and to the category of heroic-ethical fantasy. The three authors suggest two requirements, which are needed for a work of fiction to be regarded as fantasy in children's and young adult literature: phenomena that cannot exist in the world as it is and one human or human-like character. This character is one with whom the readers can empathize, and who acts as a mediator of the fantastic and normal levels of the story. The two requirements are met in Riordan's five-novel series. Percy lives in a world where the mythological and the normal coexist, and the author helps readers understand this concept through the protagonist.

The adventure story is a genre described by Grenby (2008) as the story of the hero protagonist who has to prevail over difficulties encountered on an important quest or mission. Saricks (2009) gives the adventure story a set of characteristics – an action-oriented plot, an honourable hero protagonist, an exotic and foreign setting, and a fast-moving narrative. All of the attributes are manifested in Riordan's novels. The fast-moving plots of the novels are action-oriented and filled with important quests given to Percy and his friends, as part of which they visit exotic places in the mythological world. Percy is brave, selfless and honourable, and therefore has attributes of the hero mentioned by Saricks.

Considering the above, it is apparent that Rick Riordan's series of novels incorporates six genres: the school story, the family story, Bildungsroman, myth, fantasy and the adventure story, although some of these are represented to a greater extent than others.

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**Izjava o izvornosti rada**

Izjavljujem da je ovaj završni/diplomski rad izvorni rezultat mogega rada te da se u izradi istoga nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih koji su u njemu navedeni.

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(vlastoručni potpis)