

## **An Analysis of the Adaptation of Greek Mythology in Disney+'s Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023)**

**Tiwphai Munkhongdee<sup>1</sup>, Narawan Chumnumnawin<sup>2</sup>, Pawarisorn Somsin<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*English Department, Collage of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand*

<sup>2</sup>*Global Business English, Faculty of Liberal Arts, North Bangkok University, Thailand, narawan.ch@northbkk.ac.th*

<sup>3</sup>*English Department, Collage of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand*

### **Abstract**

This research analyzes the adaptation of Greek mythology in Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) to understand how ancient myths are reimagined for a modern audience. The research objectives are to examine how classical myths are adapted for contemporary viewers and to explore the reinterpretation of mythological characters and themes in the Disney+ series. The population includes adaptations of Greek mythology in modern media, while the sample focuses on the Percy Jackson and the Olympians TV series (2023) and its original book series by Rick Riordan. The study employs qualitative methods, including textual analysis, character and thematic analysis, audience reception analysis, and comparative analysis with other adaptations such as *The Lightning Thief* (2010) and *Blood of Zeus* (2020), using data from primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. The findings reveal that the series humanizes mythological figures to address modern themes like identity, empowerment, and diversity, while balancing respect for the original myths with creative reinterpretations. It also highlights the educational potential of the adaptation and the challenges of maintaining mythological authenticity while engaging contemporary audiences.

**Keywords:** Greek mythology, Adaptation, Modernization

### **Background and Statement of the problem**

Greek mythology, which forms the foundation of much of Western literature, philosophy, and art, continues to captivate audiences with its timeless stories of gods, heroes, and fantastical adventures. These ancient narratives explore universal human themes such as identity, power, morality, fate, and transformation. Despite being centuries old, the myths remain relevant because they reflect struggles and questions that people still face today. As such, Greek mythology has not only shaped historical worldviews but also continues to inspire creative works in modern culture. Importantly, there is abundant information available related to this research problem, as seen in a wide range of literary studies, cultural research, and media analyses that focus on the reinterpretation and modernization of classical myths. Existing academic works, including those by McCune (2021), Sutherland (2019), and Tilley (2018), provide a strong foundation and demonstrate that Greek mythology's adaptation into contemporary media has become an increasingly significant area of scholarly inquiry.

In recent years, the adaptation of mythological stories into modern media has played a key role in keeping these narratives alive. Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023), a Disney+ series based on Rick Riordan's best-selling novels, is a prominent example of this trend. The series reintroduces Greek myths to a new generation of viewers by blending classical mythological elements with contemporary storytelling. It uses modern language, diverse characters, and familiar settings to make the ancient world more accessible and engaging. This approach ensures that the myths continue to resonate, especially with younger audiences who may be encountering these stories for the first time. Therefore, the research problem is clearly defined: it is essential to explore how Greek mythology is transformed in Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) to meet modern expectations while maintaining the cultural and educational value of the original myths.

What makes this adaptation particularly noteworthy is its innovative approach to presenting mythological figures and narratives. The gods and mythical beings are not only presented in a modern, sometimes humorous, light, but they are also made more relatable by addressing current social issues. For example, the character of Percy Jackson follows the traditional hero's journey but is portrayed as a teenager dealing with challenges such as identity crises, family conflict, and personal growth. Similarly, other characters like Annabeth and Grover reflect a commitment to inclusion and representation, aligning with today's values around diversity and equality. Themes like heroism, relationships with gods, power dynamics, and the quest for personal autonomy are updated to match contemporary cultural standards, creating a bridge between the ancient world and modern society.

The theoretical framework for this study is clearly grounded in well-established concepts. This research draws primarily from Joseph Campbell's (2008) theory of the Hero's Journey, which explains the stages and transformation of heroes in classical narratives, as well as modern adaptation theories that emphasize the need to balance authenticity with creative innovation. Moreover, the study is informed by adaptation theories discussed by McCune (2021) and Tilley (2018), who argue that making ancient myths relevant requires a thoughtful blend of preservation and modernization. These theoretical concepts provide a clear lens through which the adaptation can be critically analyzed.

This paper seeks to explore how Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) modernizes Greek mythology while remaining faithful to its essential themes. By analyzing character portrayals, thematic reinterpretations, audience reception, and creative liberties, this study reveals how ancient myths are introduced to contemporary audiences and investigates the adaptation's educational potential. Furthermore, it highlights the broader cultural implications of adapting classical mythology in today's rapidly changing media landscape, ensuring that these ancient stories continue to inspire and educate future generations.

### **Objective**

1. To analyze how Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) adapts and transforms classical Greek myths for a contemporary audience, focusing on the portrayal of mythological characters, narrative structures, and thematic reinterpretations.
2. To explore how the adaptation addresses modern cultural values, such as identity, empowerment, diversity, and family dynamics, while maintaining connections to the original mythological sources.

### **Expected benefits**

This research contributes to the academic conversation on classical myth adaptation in modern media by:

1. Revealing how mythological figures like Percy Jackson and Annabeth Chase are modernized to resonate with current societal themes.
2. Highlighting the ways in which the adaptation fosters interest in original Greek mythology among young audiences.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The adaptation of Greek mythology in modern media, especially through TV and film, has become an important topic in literary and media studies. Researchers have studied how ancient myths are reshaped to match modern tastes, serving both to preserve culture and to connect with today's audiences. The Disney+ series Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) is a key example of this trend, blending the timeless elements of Greek mythology with current themes like identity, family, and heroism. This literature review explores the academic discussions on adapting Greek myths in Percy Jackson and similar works, focusing on how these adaptations update classical stories and characters to align with modern values and issues.

A key focus in the literature on "Percy Jackson" is how Greek gods and heroes are adapted for modern contexts. Sutherland (2019) highlights how the series updates Greek mythology by integrating ancient stories into the framework of modern youth culture. By placing mythical figures in contemporary settings like New York City and portraying gods as flawed, relatable characters, the series connects the ancient world with today's society. Percy Jackson's struggles as a demigod with identity and family dynamics exemplify how these

characters are made more human for modern audiences. McCune (2021) emphasizes that the depiction of gods as morally complex and emotionally nuanced is crucial to the series' success in making Greek mythology engaging for younger viewers. Themes such as familial relationships and personal growth, central to the narrative, align closely with contemporary issues like identity development and the challenges of adolescence.

However, as Lewer (2020) observes, adapting complex mythological narratives often requires significant creative liberties, which can sometimes lead to oversimplification or distortion of the original stories. While modernizing Greek mythology enhances its relatability, it can also result in the loss of some of the cultural and philosophical depth inherent in the myths. This tension between staying faithful to the source material and reimagining it for contemporary audiences is a prominent concern in the literature. For example, in "Percy Jackson" the gods are frequently portrayed in ways that differ from their traditional depictions in ancient texts. Once revered and awe-inspiring figures, the gods are sometimes shown as flawed or comedic, a portrayal that some critics argue undermines their grandeur and complexity (Lewer, 2020).

Conversely, many scholars contend that creative liberties are essential for engaging contemporary audiences, particularly younger generations. Tilley (2018) emphasizes that modern adaptations of classical myths must strike a balance between entertainment and education. In Percy Jackson, this balance is achieved by preserving core aspects of the mythological world while adapting the narratives to address current issues such as diversity, inclusion, and personal empowerment. For instance, the reimagining of Annabeth Chase as a more ethnically diverse character demonstrates how the adaptation aligns with contemporary cultural values, offering representation that traditional Greek myths often lack (Tilley, 2018). These changes highlight a broader shift in the consumption of mythology today, where inclusivity and relatability take precedence.

Moreover, several scholars highlight the educational potential of "Percy Jackson" as a starting point for exploring Greek mythology. While the series takes creative liberties, it also inspires curiosity about the original myths, motivating viewers to delve deeper into the source material. McCune (2021) argues that the series acts as a gateway for young audiences to engage with Greek mythology, fostering an appreciation for these stories in their authentic form. The educational value of "Percy Jackson" lies not only in its modern retelling of myths but also in its capacity to spark interest in the cultural and historical significance of Greek mythology as a whole.

In conclusion, the literature on Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) underscores the ongoing effort to adapt classical myths for contemporary audiences. The series effectively strikes a balance between mythological authenticity and creative innovation, engaging viewers with relevant themes while introducing them to ancient stories. However, the adaptation also raises crucial questions about how to preserve the integrity of the original myths while making them accessible and entertaining for today's viewers. Future research could explore the broader cultural impact of Percy Jackson and similar adaptations, particularly in terms of how they shape public understanding of ancient mythologies and their continued relevance in the modern world.

## Research Methodology

### *Population and Sample*

The population of this study includes modern adaptations of Greek mythology in contemporary media. The selected sample focuses specifically on the Disney+ series Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) and its original source material, Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson book series. Additional comparative samples, including The Lightning Thief (2010) and Blood of Zeus (2020), are used to enhance the depth of analysis and provide broader context.

### *Data Collection Tools*

The study utilizes qualitative data collection tools, primarily document analysis frameworks and thematic coding guides. These tools are designed to systematically examine narrative structures, character development, thematic reinterpretations, and audience engagement within the adaptations.

### *Data Collection*

Data is collected systematically from three types of sources:

Primary sources: The Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) series and Rick Riordan's book series.

Secondary sources: Academic journal articles, books, and critical essays related to mythological adaptations.

Tertiary sources: Viewer reviews, online fan discussions, and social media commentary.

All collected materials are categorized based on their relevance to key study areas such as character portrayal, theme modernization, and audience reception.

## Data Analysis

The research employs four interconnected methods of analysis:

1. Textual Analysis: Examination of narrative structures, mythological reinterpretations, and character adaptation between the books, series, and original myths.
2. Character and Thematic Analysis: Comparison of mythological figures and traditional themes with their modernized portrayals in the adaptation.
3. Audience Reception Analysis: Study of viewer responses through public reviews and online discussions to assess how the adaptation is received by its target audience.
4. Comparative Analysis: Cross-examination of Percy Jackson and the Olympians with other media adaptations to identify common trends and distinct strategies in modernizing Greek mythology.

## Research Results

The Disney+ adaptation of Percy Jackson and the Olympians (2023) presents a modern reimagining of Greek mythology, blending the ancient tales with contemporary themes and values. This research analyzes the series' approach to adapting Greek mythology, focusing on character development, thematic reinterpretation, and its engagement with modern audiences. The results demonstrate how the series balances fidelity to the original myths with creative liberties, making the ancient stories accessible and relevant to today's viewers.

### Character Adaptations: Humanizing the Divine

One of the most striking features of the adaptation is the humanization of Greek gods and heroes. In both Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson book series and the Disney+ adaptation, gods such as Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades are portrayed as flawed, fallible beings, far removed from their majestic and imposing representations in traditional Greek myths. For example, Zeus in the series, while still depicted as a powerful figure, is shown as more temperamental and less omnipotent, embodying a character who struggles with familial tensions, power dynamics, and personal flaws. This reinterpretation makes the gods more relatable to the audience, particularly the younger viewers who are the target demographic.

Percy Jackson, the protagonist, is reimagined as a modern-day hero who grapples with issues of identity, family, and belonging—issues that resonate strongly with today's youth. While Percy's mythological counterpart, Perseus, is depicted as a heroic figure in ancient Greek myths, the Percy Jackson series places emphasis on his personal growth and struggles, making him a more relatable and empathetic character. This humanization of mythological figures is consistent with McCune's (2021) argument that modern adaptations often focus on making divine figures more accessible to contemporary audiences by giving them emotional depth and complexity.

Additionally, characters like Annabeth Chase and Grover Underwood serve as examples of the series' commitment to inclusivity and diversity. Annabeth, originally described in the books as blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and of Greek descent, is reimagined with a more diverse ethnic background in the series. This adaptation aligns with current societal values of inclusivity and reflects a broader cultural shift toward diversity in media, which is increasingly important for young audiences (Tilley, 2018).

### Thematic Reinterpretations: Modernizing Classical Concepts

While the series retains much of the original mythological content, it also introduces modern themes that recontextualize ancient ideas. One of the central themes in Percy Jackson and the Olympians is the exploration of identity. Percy, as a demigod, must navigate the complexities of his dual heritage—half-human, half-god—and figure out where he belongs in a world that is divided between mortals and immortals. This theme is reflective of modern concerns about identity, belonging, and self-acceptance. In contrast to the original myths, where the gods often represented abstract concepts like fate, power, and wisdom, the gods in the series are more directly involved in personal and familial relationships. This shift aligns with contemporary ideals of family dynamics, where relationships are portrayed as central to an individual's sense of self.

Another significant theme that emerges in the series is the struggle for empowerment and autonomy, particularly in how it relates to the younger generation. Percy's journey is one of self-discovery and empowerment, where he not only learns to accept his role as a demigod but also uses his powers to challenge the established order. This modern reinterpretation resonates with themes of personal agency and resistance against oppressive structures—ideas that are particularly relevant in today's socio-political climate.

The series also modernizes the depiction of divine power, moving away from the traditional view of gods as omnipotent beings who control fate. In the Percy Jackson adaptation, the gods are shown as struggling with their

own limitations, making decisions that reflect their personal biases and vulnerabilities. This shift can be seen as a commentary on contemporary society's tendency to humanize authority figures, especially political and religious leaders. By showing that even the gods are not all-knowing and all-powerful, the series invites the audience to question traditional notions of power and hierarchy, a central idea in modern discourse on authority and governance.

### **Balancing Fidelity and Creative Liberties**

One of the core findings of this research is the tension between fidelity to the original mythology and the creative liberties taken in the adaptation. According to Lewer (2020), adaptations of classical myths often face criticism for oversimplifying or distorting the source material, especially when the goal is to make the content more accessible or entertaining. In *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, certain mythological elements are altered or simplified to fit the narrative structure and pacing of a modern television series. For instance, the series omits some of the more complex aspects of Greek mythology, such as the detailed genealogies of the gods or the deeper philosophical themes present in the original myths.

However, as Tilley (2018) argues, these creative liberties are necessary to engage contemporary audiences while still preserving the essence of the myths. In the case of *Percy Jackson*, the series successfully balances the need to entertain with the obligation to educate. While it takes creative liberties with the mythological content, it retains the core values and themes that make Greek mythology timeless, such as the exploration of human nature, the consequences of hubris, and the importance of familial bonds.

Furthermore, the series serves as a gateway for younger audiences to explore the original Greek myths. While the adaptation simplifies some aspects, it sparks curiosity about the source material, encouraging viewers to delve deeper into the ancient stories. McCune (2021) highlights those adaptations like *Percy Jackson* often act as an introductory tool for younger generations to engage with classical literature, thus ensuring that Greek mythology continues to be relevant in a modern cultural context.

### **Audience Reception: Engagement with Modern Audiences**

The research also considers the reception of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by its target audience—primarily younger viewers. Audience reception studies indicate that the series resonates strongly with younger demographics, especially those who are familiar with the *Percy Jackson* books. Reviews and fan discussions highlight the appeal of the modernized gods and the relatable struggles of the demigod characters, especially Percy, who embodies the challenges of adolescence and self-discovery. This alignment with contemporary youth culture plays a significant role in the series' success as it taps into the universal themes of growing up, finding one's place in the world, and navigating complex family relationships.

Additionally, the series' diverse cast and inclusive approach have been widely praised by audiences, especially in comparison to traditional portrayals of Greek mythology, which often lacked diversity. The reimagining of Annabeth Chase and other characters aligns with modern cultural values of representation and inclusion, making the series more appealing to a broader audience.

The results of this research demonstrate that Disney+'s *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2023) successfully adapts Greek mythology for a modern audience by humanizing mythological figures, reinterpreting classical themes, and balancing fidelity with creative liberties. By making the ancient myths more relatable and inclusive, the series resonates with contemporary viewers while preserving the core elements of the original stories. This adaptation not only serves as entertainment but also fosters a renewed interest in Greek mythology, encouraging younger generations to explore the cultural and educational significance of these ancient tales.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study investigates the adaptation of Greek mythology in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2023), focusing on how the Disney+ series reimagines classical myths for a modern audience. Key findings indicate that the series successfully humanizes mythological figures, notably Percy Jackson and the Olympian gods, making them relatable to contemporary viewers—particularly youth. Themes such as identity, empowerment, and family dynamics are effectively integrated, aligning ancient myth with current cultural values.

The adaptation balances mythological fidelity with creative liberties, enabling accessibility without completely losing the essence of Greek mythology. Importantly, the study reveals that such adaptations serve both entertainment and educational purposes, encouraging younger audiences to explore traditional myths.

## Discussions

The findings of this study confirm that *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2023) effectively adapts Greek mythology to a modern context while maintaining key elements of the original myths. The discussion integrates all major research results, providing a complete and coherent interpretation.

First, the humanization of gods and demigods in the series aligns closely with McCune's (2021) argument that modern adaptations benefit from portraying divine figures as emotionally complex beings. By making characters such as Zeus and Percy Jackson more relatable, the adaptation succeeds in connecting ancient mythological concepts with contemporary concerns, particularly the search for identity and belonging among younger audiences. This supports the research objective related to character reinterpretation.

Second, the thematic modernization identified in the research results reflects the ideas of Sutherland (2019) and Tilley (2018), who argue that myths must evolve to address modern values like inclusivity, diversity, and personal empowerment. In the adaptation, classical themes such as heroism, morality, and divine authority are updated to mirror the struggles and aspirations of today's youth. This demonstrates the successful application of theoretical concepts to the analysis of thematic reinterpretation.

Third, the research highlights the balance between fidelity and creative liberties in the adaptation. Lewer's (2020) concerns about oversimplification are addressed by the series' careful retention of core mythological values, even while modernizing aspects to suit contemporary storytelling. The adaptation simplifies some mythological structures, but it preserves important moral lessons, supporting the argument that entertainment and educational objectives can coexist in modern adaptations.

Fourth, audience reception analysis shows that the adaptation acts as an educational bridge, sparking viewers' curiosity about Greek mythology and encouraging exploration of the original myths. This finding ties directly to the research objective concerning the educational potential of the adaptation and confirms that *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* effectively stimulates cultural and historical interest among young audiences.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made for future adaptations of Greek mythology in popular media:

1. Future adaptations should maintain a balance between modernization and authenticity, ensuring that while myths are made accessible, their philosophical and symbolic depth is preserved. This is based on findings regarding the tension between creative liberties and fidelity.
2. Media creators should integrate explicit educational elements into adaptations, such as mythological references, historical context explanations, or companion educational materials. This recommendation stems directly from the observed educational potential of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*.
3. Further studies should explore cross-cultural adaptations of mythology, examining how myths from different civilizations are modernized and what cultural values are emphasized. This extends the research's findings on the need to understand adaptation as both a creative and cultural act.
4. Future research should investigate long-term audience impact, particularly how exposure to modernized myths influences young people's understanding of classical literature and cultural heritage. This recommendation follows from the study's finding that adaptations can serve as gateways to deeper cultural exploration.

## Reference

- Barker, M. (2019). *Myth and modernity: The cultural reinterpretation of ancient narratives*. Oxford University Press.
- Burke, P. (2020). *The role of mythology in popular media: From ancient gods to modern superheroes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces* (3rd ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Disney+. (2023). *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: Season 1* [TV series]. Disney+.
- Dundes, A. (1984). *Sacred narrative: Readings in the theory of myth*. University of California Press.
- Graf, F. (1993). *Greek mythology: An introduction*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hard, R. (2004). *The Routledge handbook of Greek mythology*. Routledge.
- Lewer, A. (2020). Adapting mythology for the modern world: A critical analysis of mythological reimagining in contemporary media. *Mythology Studies Journal*, 15(3), 45–63.

- 
- McCune, B. (2021). *Modernizing myth: The adaptation of classical mythology in film and television*. Routledge.
- Morford, M. P., & Lenardon, R. (2018). *Classical mythology* (10th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Riordan, R. (2005–2009). *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* [Book series]. Disney-Hyperion.
- Sutherland, C. (2019). Heroes of a modern age: Mythological figures in contemporary young adult literature. *Comparative Mythology Review*, 22(4), 89–104.
- Tatar, M. (2002). *The annotated classic fairy tales*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Tilley, M. (2018). From gods to teens: Reimagining Greek mythology in young adult fiction. *Journal of Modern Adaptations*, 9(1), 112–129.
- Winkler, M. M. (2007). *Classical myth & film adaptation*. Oxford University Press.