

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 6, Issue 12, December 2018

www.ijellh.com

Ayushee Arora

Student, M.A.I,

Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,

Chandigarh, India

bookworm158@gmail.com

The Hero through the Ages- Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson as a Contemporary Counterpart to Homer's Odysseus

Abstract :

Richard Jenkyns writes that, "The Odyssey studies both man the individual, and man as a social animal and understands that these two elements of human experience are indivisible at the end of it, the hero has recovered his people, his property, and his most private place." This written about something that Homer wrote 2500 years ago, could well be a prologue to contemporary American author Rick Riordan's tongue-in-cheek, fictional account of Greek mythology and adventure- the Percy Jackson series. In both of their heroic quests, set nearly three thousand years apart, there is a clear emergence of several similar patterns, motifs, symbols, and themes. The hero across the ages remains essentially the same, echoing the sentiments and beliefs of the circumstances and society around them. This paper seeks to analyze the major similarities between Odysseus and Percy Jackson, and evaluate the latter in the light of a modern day Odysseus.

Keywords: Hero, Odysseus., Percy Jackson, Similarities.

I. INTRODUCTION

"The people who find resonant heroic themes of challenges and questing in their own lives, in their goals, creative outpourings, in their day- and night-dreams—are being led to a single

psychic fact. That is, that the creative and spiritual lives of individuals influence the outer world as much as the mythic world influences the individual. By restating this primordial understanding, Campbell offers hope that the consciousness of the individual can prompt, prick, and prod the whole of humankind into more evolution.” This introduction written by Clarissa Pinkola Estes for the 2004 edition to Joseph Campbell’s iconic work ‘*The Hero With a Thousand Faces*’ adequately epitomizes the cosmic, psychological, physical, and mental journey that all heroes, irrespective of their genre, or age, must undertake. In this paper, the same has been done to evaluate and compare the journey of two titular protagonists, namely Odysseus, and Percy Jackson, in their heroic journey.

II. GODLY LINEAGE

Odysseus has as his maternal great-grandfather Hermes, the god of messengers and thievery, and Khione, goddess of the snow, and daughter of Daedalus, the greatest inventor to have lived in ancient Greece. Percy is the son of Poseidon, god of the sea, albeit being named after one of the most famous demigod children of Zeus, Perseus. This descent from godliness plays a major role in the lives of the two protagonists respectively. Both Odysseus and Percy are always on the brink, between being completely mortal, and being god-like, because of their status as a legacy, in Odysseus' case, or a demigod in Percy's. Always at conflict, either with the god's decisions, or at wars and battles both wittingly and inadvertently created by them, in which the protagonists are merely pawns. In the course of their lives, both often face the wrath of different gods. It's almost as if both of them are bandied about as disposable possessions, unwilling allies or enemies to the gods and their strategies.

III. IMMORTALITY

The question of immortality is one that plagues both Odysseus and Percy in their respective texts. Because of their respective circumstances at a given point of time, and their immense contribution to saving most, if not all of humankind, they are both offered immortality. First, both are offered immortality by the immortal sorceress Calypso, when they are trapped on her island. In lieu of this immortality, both Odysseus and Percy would have had to stay with Calypso, who was destined to fall in love with all the heroes who washed up on her island Ogygia. But what's interesting to note is, that, especially in ancient Greece, where the *Odyssey* was written, immortality was seen as something that was the zenith of absolution and ambition, and yet, Odysseus chooses to turn it down, as does Percy, nearly three millennia later. Another similarity one sees in both their refusals of immortality is their carefully worded and ambiguous disengagement with Calypso, and their reason to refuse the same as that of their respective partners back home. Penelope, the faithful wife, in the case of Odysseus, and Annabeth Chase, who whilst not romantically involved with Percy at the time of his island imprisonment, was the reason he declined his offer of immortality. As a matter of fact, Percy goes a step further, and refuses immortality a second time, even when he is offered it by Zeus, King of the Olympian Gods himself. Even the reasoning behind the similar decisions of these two is alike. They both would rather grow old with their loved ones, as opposed to taking on the burden of immortality.

IV. MOTIVATION TO CROSS INTO THE SUPERNATURAL

Both Odysseus and Percy, have both personal reasons, as well as the burden of rescuing all of humankind from a terrible catastrophe as the motivating factors

behind their agreement of the quests. Percy's motivation is to save the world from destruction and save his mother from Hades. Odysseus is trying to get back home to save his kingdom and to be with his beloved wife, Penelope. Both Percy and Odysseus' motivation is similar, they are both are trying to save their worlds and save their loved ones, their family. They will both go through anything to accomplish their quest. Percy is on a quest to retrieve the lightning bolt to save the world, and his mother from Hades in the underworld. Percy goes through battles with monsters and immortals to save the world from destruction and to be reunited with his mom again. Now Odysseus went to Troy to get Helen back and win the Trojan War, and eventually return to his beloved wife Penelope.

V. THE MENTOR

Both Odysseus and Percy have as their mentor Chiron, the centaur son of Kronos, Lord of Time. Chiron acts as a mentor, guide and confidant to both the heroes. He equips them with various skill sets, while helping them hone up on their already existing talents. Archery, defence, and strategizing are a few examples of what Chiron helps not just these two, but all heroes with. But the true strength of both Ulysses and Percy lies in their sword fighting. They are both swordsmen par excellence, and besides leading their side to victory, they also excel in hand to hand combat. Even when they seek out the guidance of The Oracle, they consult Chiron, and ask for his advice on the prophecies and their interpretation.

VI. ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Over the course of their heroic journey, both Percy and Odysseus encounter several enemies, whilst fighting along with their trusted allies. Odysseus has Laertes, Argos and Eumaeus as his friends. Percy has his unflinchingly loyal satyr companion Grover Underwood and Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena, as his allies. Within the gods too, both have their fair share of distrusters and supporters. But while the concept of alliances and enmity in the two texts is essentially the same, the two have different godly alliances. Athena, guide, and mentor to Odysseus, is mistrustful of Percy, and is often condescending towards him. Zeus, who despises Percy, was the same god who gave Odysseus his blessing. Poseidon, the sire of Percy, favours him, but Odysseus had to incur the wrath of the sea-god.

VII. THE LOTUS SYMBOLISM

In '*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*', Percy and his friends get trapped in the Lotus Hotel and Casino, where time and memories cease to exist. In the third book of the series, we also see that Bianca and Nico Di Angelo were left for more than seven decades in this hotel, following which, they had no memory of their past lives, and they remained ageless and immortal as long as they were in the hotel. Both these references clearly allude to Book 9 of '*The Odyssey*', wherein Odysseus and his men come upon the land of the Lotus-eaters, and are offered the intoxicating lotus fruit, which catapults the men into a catatonic stupor, and unwilling to leave. Odysseus, like Percy, two and a half millennia later, is the first to come to his senses and shake himself out of this inebriated reverie, and both of have to forcefully pry their companions from the magical land and hotel, respectively.

VIII. GROWTH AND EVOLUTION

The journey of both Odysseus and Percy is filled with perils, strife, and adventure. Through the course of their journey, we see not just their physical evolution, but also their emotional, mental, and spiritual growth. Both the texts are almost Bildungsroman-esque in character, showcasing the evolution of two men who unwillingly shoulder the responsibility that is thrust upon them, but later accept their burden as a necessary one, and morph into great leaders, who are not just warriors, but also strategizers and thinkers.

IX. THE DUALITIES IN THEIR CHARACTERS

One reason why both Odysseus and Percy appeal so greatly to everyone across the milieu is because of their human-ness, likeability, and relatability. Both Ulysses and Percy are known tricksters and merry-makers, but they are also wonderful human beings and great warriors. Through all the curve balls that life throws at both of them, they still manage to come out on top, with their sense of humour intact. Both are flawed, which only makes them more endearing as characters. They are not gods, on a pedestal. They are very much like us- emotive, human, complex, and flawed.

X. NOSTOS

XI. In both the texts in question, the Greek concept of ‘Nostos’ applies. ‘Nostos’ means homecoming. It reflects the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical peace that the protagonists finally get after their arduous journey, and trials and tribulations. After all that they have gone through, the heroes are finally free to come home to their people and their loved ones, and look on partial, if

not complete contentment at the peace , which they played a major role in bringing about.

XII. THE WOMEN IN THEIR LIVES

Women play a pivotal role in the lives of both these characters. An interesting fact to be noted is that both Odysseus and Percy have almost the same number of women that affect the course of their lives. The women in the lives of the two , are the same, or have the same characteristics. Both Odysseus and Percy encounter Circe the sorceress, who traps both men on her island, turns them into guinea pigs, has an affair with Odysseus ,but not with Percy, and finally lets them go. On her magical island, with her braided hair, azaleas and junipers, Calypso falls in love with both these heroes when they wash up on her shore. While not exactly love, there is a demonstration of affection and tenderness shown between Calypso and both men. Nausicaa of the Phaenicians was to Odysseus what Rachel Elizabeth Dare was to Percy, because both the women express a vague sensual malaise towards their respective male counterparts, and both have the gift of fore-vision. Athena, guiding force and wise mentor to Odysseus, is reflected in steel-nerved and . astute Sally Jackson, Percy's mother. Finally, Penelope, the most important woman in the life of Odysseus , and the one he eventually returns to, is similar to Annabeth, who Percy literally and metaphorically gives up anything for.

I. CONCLUSION

Through a comparative analysis, this paper has tried to illustrate the similarities between Homer's Odysseus and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson, and to effectually drive home the main point given by Joseph Campbell, that the heroes in all stories essentially remain the same, and often draw on their precedents for adventures, solutions, and beliefs.

Works Cited

Jenkyns, Richard- 'Classical Literature: A Pelican Introduction' , Penguin Books- 2015

Campbell, Joseph- 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces', Commemorative edition, Princeton University Press- 2004

Riordan, Rick- The Percy Jackson series, Disney Publishing Worldwide- 2012 edition

Homer, 'The Odyssey', translated by Samuel Butler, 1921 edition.