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**Mythology Deconstructed: Tracing the Postmodern Elements in Rick Riordan's
*Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief***

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Abstract:

Popular fiction often comes under the umbrella term 'popular culture' and has hardly received any critical attention. But nowadays there is a change in attitude towards popular fiction particularly with the advent of postmodern theories which calls for a blurring of distinction between highbrow and lowbrow genres. When Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* is looked at from a layman's point of view the novel is undoubtedly a part of the so called 'popular fiction.' But if one attempts a re-reading of the novel particularly through a postmodern lens one cannot help but notice the peculiar literary themes and devices which make it a serious literary work. It cannot simply be dismissed as belonging to the category of 'popular fiction' but can be read as an instance of postmodern fiction too. This paper attempts to read Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* in the light of postmodern theory.

Key Words: Postmodernism, intertextuality, pastiche, incredulity towards meta-narratives.

'Popular fiction' often comes under the umbrella term 'popular culture' and has hardly received any critical attention. Earlier, most critics shared the view that whereas literature is original, complex and is indifferent to the marketplace, popular fiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic. 'Real' writers spend decades agonizing over each sentence, while as Ken Gelder remarks, genre hacks produce a new paperback each year, to be 'consumed' in airports and quickly discarded (12-15). According to Raymond Williams the term 'popular' originally meant 'belonging to the people.' But in its modern usage the word means 'well-liked' and "carries a strong pejorative sense relating to its implication of 'selling out to gain favour'" (198). Edward Said also talks about "the huge gap



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between popular literature on the one hand, and the more literary kind of writing, the serious novels that are being produced” (5). A popular novel according to J.A. Cuddon is the one that has wide readership belonging to the middle or “low-brow” category. Such a novel “may not possess much literary merit” (685). But nowadays there is a change in attitude towards popular fiction particularly with the advent of postmodern theories which calls for a blurring of distinction between highbrow and lowbrow genres. Popular fiction cannot be dismissed simply as ‘low brow’ with no eternal literary qualities; a novel may be popular but that does not mean that it is devoid of any literary qualities. Nowadays popular fiction studies are gaining fervor.

Rick Riordan is a widely acclaimed American novelist of fantasy and popular fiction, and is often referred to as ‘American Rowling.’ He was born in San Antonio, Texas, USA in 1964. He has written five novels of the *Percy Jackson* series, six novels of *The House of Olympus* series, three novels of *The Kane Chronicles* series etc. According to Oldon, “The *Lightning Thief* is a great book for adults and kids. I’ve already recommended it to a couple of adult friends who experienced the same kind of can’t-put-it-down pull that I did” (1). To quote Krishna, “These books seem to appeal to all ages” (5). Therefore it can be said that the *Lightning Thief* belong to the category of ‘crossover novels’, Riordan has written the book for children but it has crossed its boundaries and became popular among adults too.

When Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* is looked at from a layman’s point of view, the novel is undoubtedly a part of the so called ‘popular fiction’, so are its sequels. Almost all the features of popular fiction can be identified in it. But if one attempts a re-reading of the novel particularly through a postmodern lens one cannot help but notice the peculiar literary themes and devices which make it a work of literary importance. It cannot simply be dismissed as belonging to the category of ‘popular fiction’ but can be read as an instance of postmodern fiction too. This paper attempts to read Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* in the light of postmodern literary theory and trace out the postmodern characteristics in the novel.

Postmodernism is a notion that surfaces in various disciplines including paintings, architecture, songs, cinema, literature, communication, fashion and technology etc.



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Postmodernism has emerged as an area of academic study only in the mid-1980s. It is difficult to offer a history of postmodernism, as it is not certain exactly when postmodernism has originated. Postmodernism has a nebulous or an unmapped zone of bogs and briars as it lends itself to “evasion and ambiguity” (Grosz 8). In postmodern theory certainties become uncertainties and boundaries tremble and collapse. ‘Postmodern’, suggests the existence of multiple genres within a text. The postmodern texts defy any simple classification or conclusion. The shifting of generic boundaries allows the writers to explore and explode the distinctions between fact and fiction or fiction and reality. According to Terry Eagleton, postmodernist culture and literature will “dissolve its own boundaries and become coextensive with ordinary commodified life itself, whose ceaseless exchanges and mutations in any case recognize no formal frontiers which are not constantly transgressed”(141). Riordan exploits the postmodern tendencies to meet his ends. In Riordan’s texts there is an interaction of distinct genres, which range from lowbrow to highbrow. Questions of hierarchy come to play while speaking of genres. A postmodern reading makes such questions irrelevant: “In a game that is constantly changing and rearranging its pieces, no single genre can claim top place in the hierarchy; instead, it is the continual interplay among the tags and thus the genres that becomes most significant, as this interplay is what creates the multiple meanings of the whole” (Alton 222).

The study of postmodern literature has always been interesting because of its contemporary relevance to us. It attempts to deconstruct the so called modern and it promotes obscurantism. This new form of literature describes the antithetical to the conventional systems of so called morality. Literature of postmodernism rejects the modernist system of beliefs such as historical, rational and scientific notion in favour of ironic, self-conscious and experimental work of art. When one attempts a postmodern deconstructive reading, the text opens into diverse possibilities of reading and interpretation. Popular fiction ceases to be categorised as low brow. One can also find that postmodern writers do not present the ideal world instead they project the real world and the problems in different ways.

In *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, Rick Riordan merges Greek mythology with popular culture, particularly with children’s literature; uses mythology to explain something that is difficult to understand; and shows how mythology still can be used as an



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effective tool to give a message to the society. In answer to a question in an interview with Erin, how did he get the idea for this series? Riordan said that his son, Haley, who was studying Greek myths, asked him to tell some bedtime stories about gods and heroes. When Riordan ran out of myths his son was disappointed and asked him to make up something new with the same characters. He made up Percy Jackson and his quest to recover Zeus' lightning bolt. When it was done his son asked him to write it out as a book. That is how Percy Jackson came into existence (1).

The story is written in the first person point of view. Percy Jackson, the hero of the story is narrating the story and the plot is based on his experiences, thoughts, and his conversations with the other characters. This form of narration lessens the gap between the readers and the story as the readers feel like they are having a conversation with Percy himself. It also helps the readers to accept the blurring of distinction between postmodern reality and ancient mythology.

In order to blur the distinction between mythology and reality Riordan uses simple colloquial language which he occasionally mixes with Greek words. In postmodernist fiction language plays an important role in reflecting the hybridity of the work of art. In fact language calls attention to itself. Linda Hutcheon claimed "postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterized by the ironic quote marks" (15). This irony, along with humour and the general concept of 'play' are among the most recognisable aspects of postmodernism.

The appeal of the *Lightning Thief* is in its language, the humorous and sarcastic tone, and the fast moving plot. O'Sullivan says, the series is so popular "because the writing is a crisp and easy to read" (1). Krishna also shares the same opinion: "They're great easy reads and are definitely good for when you want something light and enjoyable" (1). Take for instance the opening of the novel:

My name is Percy Jackson. I'm twelve years old. Until a few months ago, I was a boarding student at Yancy Academy, a private school for troubled kids in upstate New York. Am I a troubled kid? Yeah. You could say that. I could start at any point in my short miserable life to prove it, but things really started



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going bad last May, when our sixth-grade class took a field trip to Manhattan— twenty-eight mental case kids and two teachers on a yellow school bus, heading to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at ancient Greek and Roman stuff. (LT2-3)

This passage is enough testimony that the language Riordan uses in the book is simple and colloquial with a choice of ordinary words and expressions which appeal to a variety of readers including children and adults. In addition to being light and entertaining, the tone of the novel also appeals to the readers: “The sardonic tone of the narrator’s voice lends a refreshing air of realism to this riotously paced quest tale of heroism that questions the realities of our world, family, friendship and loyalty” (Kirkus 2). Another critic also expressed a similar view: “There are so many things that I love this book that I don’t know where to start. Firstly, I love how the author uses a relaxed, causal, trendy first-person narrative. It comes off as a terrific-personal journal that is almost believable. I also thoroughly enjoy the comedy embedded within the story...” (Robichaud). The tone of the novel can be regarded as a blend of comedy and sarcasm. According to Smith, “Overall, the writing is excellent with a good degree of humor” (3).

An excellent instance of humour can be found when Grover tells Percy, “Your mom married Gabe for you”, Grover told me. “You call him ‘Smelly’, but you’ve got no idea. The guy has this aura.... Yuck. I can smell him from here. I can smell traces of him on you, and you haven’t been near him for a week.” “Thanks,” I said. “Where’s the nearest shower?” (LT165). This kind of humorous situations and dialogues are strewn into the pages of the novel which makes it amusing and entertaining.

Also Riordan has used certain humorous modern day names for some of his characters, who are ancient Greek Gods as well as modern day city dwellers of the Western civilization. For instance Medusa - the snake woman of Greek mythology, is Aunty Em, Procrustus - The Stretcher, is Crusty, Dionysius - the God of Wine is Mr. D. Riordan also uses certain Greek swear words to add credibility to his postmodern fantasy.



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As mentioned earlier, in the novel there is interplay of different genres. It can be read as an exemplum of children's fiction, bildungsroman, fantasy, young adult fiction, school story, mystery story, etc. Pastiche is a concept which can be linked with postmodern intertextuality and it means to mix, or 'paste' together, several elements, subjects or genres which are not previously considered fit for literature. In postmodern literature this can be considered as paying homage to past styles. It can be seen as an illustration of the disorganized, multiple, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society. Since postmodern fiction draws from various authors and genres there is no question of originality because everything, every expression or phrase has been used up. As a result of the use of pastiche, the distinction between genres has become blurred. Also noteworthy is the blurring of distinction between good and evil, human and non-human, dreams and reality.

Hybridity and undecidability are postmodern characteristics as well. There are many hybrid characters which deconstruct the dichotomy beast/being. Chiron is a centaur, who is half-human, half-horse, who trains the heroes of Camp Half Blood. Again Grover is a satyr: half-human, half-goat. Both exhibit humane characteristics. But a minotaur is not able to control its animalistic instinct, it is also a hybrid – half-human, half-bull. These are all characters from Greek mythology incorporated into the postmodern world.

There are many intertextual elements in the novel. The intertextuality of certain works of postmodern fiction - the reliance on literary works that have been produced earlier, tries to comment on the situation in which both literature and society found themselves in the second half of the 20th century: existing, and fashioning themselves on the backs of those that had come before. Riordan has borrowed extensively from Greek mythology. Infact Greek mythology is the cultural matrix in which Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series has taken shape.

Some critics have pointed out its similarity with J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Wulandari finds that *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* has the same formula as Harry Potter (1). The Calico Critic says: "The similarities to the Harry Potter books were so many I eventually quit counting them all. I almost felt like this author was simply telling his own Potter story and just changing a few of the basic tenants around" ("Book Review" 1). Just as



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in the Harry Potter series in this novel too names are powerful. “Don’t say his name,” [Sally] warned. “Names have power” (LT55). This idea is reiterated in the novel “names are powerful things. You don’t just go around using them for no reason” (69). Because of the fear of the names they use indirect descriptions, for instance when the Furies attack, Percy asks Annabeth. ““You almost called her something. A Fury? They’re Hades’ torturers, right?” Annabeth glanced nervously at the ground, as if she expected it to open up and swallow her. “You shouldn’t call them by name, even here. We call them the Kindly Ones, if we have to speak of them at all”” (92). This kind of word play where an epithet or other indirect description is substituted for a proper name is called Antonomasia (Baldick 15). However Percy is not bothered to call them or any other God or monster by name may be because of his ignorance or maybe he dares.

Postmodernism harbours a disbelief in traditional authority and has “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). Largely, traditional authority is treacherous and not reliable. Authority figures are to be battled with because of their loyalty to the metanarratives. Percy Jackson is an excellent example who has a disregard for traditional authority figures, so as to say Greek Gods. At first Percy don’t have any belief in Gods. He has incredulity towards the metanarrative of Olympian Gods controlling the destiny of humans. He is even ready to challenge a God and be outrightly impolite when he understands that he is being used by Gods and is a mere pawn in their hands. He challenges Ares, the God of War, who tries to kill Percy after his return from the underworld which goes against Ares’ plan.

I turned back to Ares. “Are you going to fight me now?” I asked. “Or are you going to hide behind another pet?”

Ares’s face was purple with rage. “Watch it, kid. I could turn you into-”

“A cockroach,” I said. “Or a tapeworm. Yeah, I’m sure. That’d save you from getting your godly hide whipped, wouldn’t it?”

Flames danced along the top of his glasses. “Oh, man, you are really asking to be smashed into a grease spot.”

“If I lose, turn me into anything you want. Take the bolt. If I win, the helm and the bolt are mine and you have to go away.”

Ares sneered ... “How would you like to get smashed: classic or modern?”



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I showed him my sword. “That’s cool, dead boy,” he said. “Classic it is.” [His] baseball bat changed into a huge, two-handed sword ...
“Percy,” Annabeth said. “Don’t do this. He’s a god.”
“He’s a coward,” I told her. (LT339)

This kind of impudence is seen in Percy’s demeanour but that is because of the Olympian Gods’ unsympathetic attitude towards half-bloods.

Percy takes up the dangerous quest to the underworld to find and return the lightning bolt of Zeus before the summer solstice not because of reverence to the Gods, but for two reasons, one is to bring back his mother Sally Jackson and the other is to stop another war between the Gods, which will be the Third World War for the humans. The quest theme in *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* is similar to those in mythology, folk tales and fairy tales. Percy’s quest at once brings to mind the quest for the Holy Grail, Golden Fleece and the modern day versions like the talisman in Stephen King’s *Talisman*.

The ‘quest’ serves as a favorite theme and plot device for both traditional and modern writers. It is quite common in fantasy literature. The quest theme is part and parcel of both Eastern and Western philosophical tradition. The quest story is often regarded as a parallel for salvation and therefore the hero in a quest is not always meant to return to live comfortably in the world that he has left. “A return may, indeed be impossible. Aeneas quests for a home land, having lost Troy at the beginning of Virgil’s Aeneid, and he does not return to Troy to re-found it but settles in Italy” (“Quest” wikipedia.org). Here in *Lightning Thief* too, none of the Gods is bothered about Percy’s survival or his return to the mortal realm. Percy survives most of his escapades and lives to tell the tale because of his own demi-God skills and also because of help from his friends.

Riordan also gives importance to choices in his novel. Postmodernism suggests that one’s real powers as an individual lies in the choices one makes independent of the defining conventions and metanarratives of the culture in which one lives. In so much as one refuse to accept categories and being categorized one self-actualize and empower oneself. Here Percy has a choice whether to take up the dangerous quest or not. It is up to Percy to decide. After



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officially taking up the quest, Percy consults the Oracle in the attic, “the spirit of Delphi, speaker of the prophecies” (LT146) he asks, “What is my destiny?”

Suddenly there were four men sitting around the table, playing cards. Their faces became clearer. It was Smelly Gabe and his buddies. My fists clenched, though I knew this poker party couldn't be real. It was an illusion, made out of mist. Gabe turned toward me and spoke in the rasping voice of the Oracle: You shall go west, and face the god who has turned. His buddy on the right looked up and said in the same voice: You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned. The guy on the left threw in two poker chips, then said: You shall be betrayed by one who calls you a friend. Finally, Eddie, our building super, delivered the worst line of all: And you shall fail to save what matters most, in the end. (146-47)

Here, according to the prophecy Percy will fail in his quest. Chiron asks him the details of the prophecy which Percy is reluctant to give as he does not want to tell him about the betrayal by a friend and his failure to save what matters most. Chiron may have guessed that Percy is holding back something and says: “the Oracle's words often have double meanings. Don't dwell on them too much. The truth is not always clear until events come to pass” (148). Here Chiron, like Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* series, is shattering the metanarrative of the prophecy and deconstructs its totalising nature.

Percy is faced with the greatest choice in his life in his quest to the underworld. In the underworld, Percy meets his mother who has been kept by Hades as a pawn. Actually the trio has been tricked by Ares, Luke and Kronos. They have come this far for the object that was already inside Percy's backpack given to him by Ares. They are about to become the victims of Hades' wrath and suddenly Percy got reminded of the pearls gifted by his father which would help him in a desperate situation and took them out. “Only three,” Hades said. “What a shame. You do realize each [pearl] only protects a single person. Try to take your mother, then, little godling. And which of your friends will you leave behind to spend eternity with me? Go on. Choose. Or give me the backpack and accept my terms” (LT329). Both Grover and Annabeth are willing to sacrifice their lives for Percy's mother. But Percy has made the



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hardest choice and left his mother behind not because he does not love her but because that was the appropriate decision at that time.

In the novel, one can see an intermingling of realistic and fantastic elements. Take for instance, the earlier passage about the prophecy, the prophecy is an official prophecy about the hero who is going to take up a quest. But it is pictured as if Percy's step father Gabe Ugliano and his buddies are voicing it. Magical realism is primarily a literary style or genre of fiction, in which magical elements are incorporated into a realistic atmosphere in order to access a deeper understanding of reality. "The themes and subjects are often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality. Some of the characteristic features of this kind of fiction is the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre ..." (qtd. in Sharma and Chaudhary 196-97).

Postmodern literature is also remarkable for the prevalence of fantasy. Fantasy is a genre of fiction that usually uses magic and other supernatural elements as a primary plot device, theme, or setting. *The Lightning Thief* proves to possess elements of fantasy in it significantly. The presence of mythological and supernatural creatures, Gods and Demi Gods, Mount Olympus, the Underworld etc., make the novel more fascinating to the readers. Riordan makes extensive use of fantasy as a narrative technique along the tradition of magical realism. The whole technique of narration itself is fantastic as Riordan mixes fact and fiction, so that they become indistinguishable from each other. According to Rushdie, "I think of it (fantasy) as a method of producing intensified images of reality... One thing that is valuable in fiction is to find techniques for making actuality more intense, so that you experience it more intensely in the writing than you do outside the writing" (qtd. in Reder 43).

The novel is about the adventure of the main character, Percy Jackson, who is an abnormal kid because he is dyslexic. He is the son of an American Woman, Sally Jackson and Poseidon, the Greek sea god. But Percy does not know anything about his father or his demigod status until he reaches Camp Half Blood. Annabeth says, "Face it. You're a half-blood" (LT94). Percy is a half-blood - half human, half god. His quest is to find and return Zeus' master bolt which is stolen by Luke - the son of Hermes, for Kronos - the Titan who



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wishes to overthrow Gods. In the quest he encounters many monsters from Greek mythology such as Furies, Fates, Minotaur, hell hounds, Medusa, Echidna - the mother of monsters, and her son Chimera, Procrustes, Cerberus - the three-headed dog of the Underworld etc. Percy is accompanied by his protector satyr, and another half-blood, Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena, the Greek Goddess of wisdom, thus making up the archetypal trio. There are other characters too from Greek mythology such as the three powerful Gods - Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, Ares - the War God, Dionysius, Chiron, Charon - the ferryman of the Dead, Argus - the many eyed watchman, Naiads - the female fresh water spirits, Nereids - female spirits of the sea, Dryads - female spirits of nature etc. Allusion to the mythical Lotus eaters is also there when the trio reaches the Lotus Hotel and Casino and forgets about everything as they got themselves immersed in different kinds of virtual games. The setting of the novel is cities in USA; the entrance to the Underworld of Greek mythology is California, and Mount Olympus, the abode of Greek Gods is located in New York, on top of Empire State Building. Percy wonders when he goes to Mount Olympus on a lift in the Empire State Building: “This place can’t be here, I told myself. The tip of a mountain hanging over New York City like a billion-ton asteroid? How could something like that be anchored above the Empire State Building, in plain sight of millions of people, and not get noticed?” (351). There is a blend between Greek mythology and real American life. The wars, even the world wars are depicted as war between the Gods.

Magic realistic texts use archetypal elements and folklores. Fairy tale elements, myths and folklores are common in the series. The Cinderella story can be seen in Percy’s life with his cruel stepfather. Here we can see a grotesque parody of the traditional family. Percy’s situation can also be likened to that of King Arthur with regard to the anonymity regarding origins.

Another postmodern feature – metafiction, attempts to make the readers believe the artificiality of the work of art and it also generally ignores the obligation for ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. Writers of metafiction make us believe their world to a great extent by incorporating the essence of magical realism. In other words the technique of fabulation is presented with an effect of reality where one feels part of the make believe world and finds oneself involved to a great extent. These are the opening lines of the novel:



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Look, I didn't want to be a half-blood.

If you're reading this because you think you might be one, my advice is: close this book right now. Believe whatever lie your mom or dad told you about your birth, and try to lead a normal life.

Being a half-blood is dangerous. It's scary. Most of the time, it gets you killed in painful, nasty ways.

If you're a normal kid, reading this because you think it's fiction, great. Read on. I envy you for being able to believe that none of this ever happened.

But if you recognize yourself in these pages-if you feel something stirring inside-stop reading immediately. You might be one of us. And once you know that, it's only a matter of time before they sense it too, and they'll come for you.

Don't say I didn't warn you. (LT2)

This is an excellent instance of fabulation in which the readers are made aware of the artificiality of the work of art.

The influence of Michel Foucault can be seen in the novel especially with regard to Riordan's treatment of the power structures that govern the community of Gods and half-bloods. Foucault like many postmodern theorists questioned the theory of Enlightenment because these "totalizing theories are reductionistic and exclusionary. Such theories arbitrarily privilege particular social dynamics and political agendas while excluding or marginalizing others" (Seidman, 234).

Foucault realised that "Revolts surfaced around psychiatry, sexuality, gender, and education, in universities, families, cultural institutions, and prisons, and was initiated by prisoners, students, gays, women, professionals and laborers" (Seidman, 233). Here Percy is viewed as a troubled kid, has been pushed out of many schools and many of his teachers think that he is mad. Most of the half-bloods share the same predicament.

Annabeth frowned ... This is the only safe place on earth for kids like us."

"You mean, mentally disturbed kids?"

... Half-human."



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“Half-human and half-what?” “Half-god.”

Annabeth nodded. “Your father isn’t dead, Percy. He’s one of the Olympians.”

“That’s ... crazy ... “But if all the kids here are half-gods-”

“Demigods,” Annabeth said. “That’s the official term. Or half-bloods” ...

“And my dad?”

“Undetermined,” Annabeth said, “like I told you before. Nobody knows” ...

your father has to send you a sign claiming you as his son. Sometimes it happens ...

“The gods are busy. They have a lot of kids ... 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. I’d known kids like that at Yancy Academy, shuffled off to boarding school by rich parents who didn’t have the time to deal with them. But gods should behave better. (LT100-02)

The half-bloods are sorted into twelve cabins each representing the twelve Greek Gods. The undetermined demigods are loaded into the Hermes Cabin. Percy realises why Hermes Cabin is overcrowded and why some cabins are empty and understands that undetermined parentage is the problem with half-bloods in the Half-Blood Camp. The Gods simply neglect their offspring.

The hero of postmodern fiction is not an exceptional character. Percy Jackson is not an exceptional character, he himself is aware of this when he says: “I was a nobody, from a family of nobodies” (LT25). He also gets insulted many a times. Even the gods insult him. Dionysius says: “Well, well,” Mr. D said without looking up. “Our little celebrity” ... “And don’t expect me to kowtow to you, mortal, just because old Barnacle-Beard is your father” (137-38). He has been tricked and used by Gods many a time. Even his father Poseidon claims Percy as his son only to get his name cleared of Zeus’ accusation. Poseidon needs a hero, a half-blood to find and return the master bolt of Zeus and to prevent the Third World War.



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Narrative misdirection is used by Riordan to telling effect as he misdirects the readers into believing that Hades is the villain. Luke tricks Percy into believing that he is Percy's well-wisher and he presents Percy with flying shoes which is actually enchanted to take Percy and the lightning bolt to Tartarus where Kronos is awaiting his regeneration and rise to power.

Postmodernism is called the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (Jameson xiv). 'Late capitalism' entails that society has progressed beyond the industrial age and into the information age, in which we are constantly bombarded with advertisements, videos, and product placements. Likewise, Jean Baudrillard claimed that postmodernity is defined by a shift into hyperreality in which simulations have replaced the real. This is depicted by many postmodern authors in their work by creating products that parallel actual advertisements, or by situating their characters in circumstances in which they cannot escape technology. In *Lighting Thief* we have postmodern character names incorporated into the story line particularly in the scene where Percy sees the Fates "wondering who they could possibly be for-Sasquatch or Godzilla" (LT30).

When Percy and his friends enter the Lotus Hotel and Casino, they got mesmerised by the hyper real world.

The whole lobby was a giant game room. And I'm not talking about cheesy old Pac-Man games or slot machines. There was an indoor waterslide snaking around the glass elevator, which went straight up at least forty floors. There was a climbing wall on the side of one building, and an indoor bungee-jumping bridge. There were virtual-reality suits with working laser guns. And hundreds of video games, each one the size of a widescreen TV. Basically, you name it, this place had it ... There were waitresses and snack bars all around, serving every kind of food you can imagine. (LT267-68)

So we have a postmodern world where reality is replaced by simulated images juxtaposed with the Greek mythological world.



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A look at gender roles in the novel reveals that there are not many women characters in the novel. Among the main female characters, Sally Jackson and Annabeth Chase deserves mention. Both are strong postmodern independent women characters and they think for themselves rather than allowing other persons to do it for them.

A concern for ecology is also there in the novel as Riordan speaks about environmental issues. Riordan talks about how humans pollute soil, air and water without any ecological concern. Riordan also talked about the pollution in the river Mississippi. When Percy falls into the river he sees “clouds of silt and disgusting garbage-beer bottles, old shoes, plastic bags-swirled up all around [him]” (LT220).

Most of the postmodern traits such as intertextuality, blurring of boundaries, self-reflexive language, metafiction, magic realism, metafiction, incredulity toward metanarratives etc., can be identified in Riordan’s novel. The author has also talked about strong postmodern women characters and has a strong ecological concern. One has to dive deep into the novel and re-view it by reading between the lines to discover its matrix and to find a place for the series in the literary canon. When one analyses the postmodern features and read the novel in the light of postmodernism one cannot deny the fact that Rick Riordan is a writer of his times writing for postmodern readers. Understanding postmodern literature and reading *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* as a postmodern work of art accounts for both the popularity and the literary merit of the series.

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