

# Chapter I

## Introduction

I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination.

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Knowledge is limited.

Imagination encircles the world.

– Albert Einstein

Human beings are endowed with the unique gift of imagination, the product of active intellect and stimulation of nature, which plants seeds of ideas that transform the individual and the world. Everything that humans create are first imagined and Marie Jakober reiterates the same in the essay, “The Continuum of Meaning” (2008) that imagination “. . . can deepen our understanding of the self and the world . . . We cannot work for a future we have not imagined” (30). The great Roman statesman and scholar Cicero, coins the Latin phrase *oculi mentis* which means “the eyes of the mind” in English and equates it with imagination denoting that an active mind sees beyond what exists and creates universal dreams (Law 168). As Carl Jung in *Active Imagination* (1913) rightly remarks, imagination is “. . . the creative source of all that has made progress possible in human life” (qtd. in Watson 124). It gives freshness to one’s vision, enables risk taking, makes visionaries, boosts productivity, provides motivation to complete a task, achieve goals, and move on to the next challenge. The extraordinary human virtue of imagination has helped early humans to foster creativity, develop tools, enhance hunting skills, strengthen social interactions and language from oral to written literature, art, craft, and scientific and technological innovation, which continues to evolve to the present day, creating great intellectual, artistic, scientific, social and political, and technological revolutions in the world.

Imagining, narrating, and writing are only a step ahead of each other as imagination opens a window of creative experience through language in the form of oral renditions of fairytales, folklore, myths, legends, and fables, which have evolved with improvisation in narrative techniques, theatrics, and embellishments, leading to the creation of better versions of stories which are told and retold to be kept alive. The practitioners of the art create a world where the possible and the impossible co-exist, making the stories more appealing to human minds and transporting the listeners from the physical world (real world of authors and readers) to an alternate world of imagination and fantasy. The transition of fantasy in literature to the reality of readers is the centre of focus of the current study, and an in-depth analysis of both can be achieved through a glance into the history of realistic and fantastic literature.

The symbiotic relationship between literature and life has been perfectly captured in realistic fiction, which runs deep into the reality of life and first crept into art, gradually manifesting itself in literature to mark the emergence of the movement, literary realism, with its origin in France. Literary realism is a reaction to romanticism, an intellectual aesthetic movement from the 18<sup>th</sup> century that is concerned with creative ideals exhibited in art, literature, and music with an exaggerated glorification of imagination, worship of the beauty of nature, and celebration of the life of common men.

Realistic fiction delves into the authentic lives of people and portrays their strengths and imperfections, a technique in literature which is termed as “verisimilitude”, a combination of two words, “verum” and “similis”, meaning “truth” and “similar”. The deep insight of the writers enables them to display an array of themes like conflicting human emotions and relationships, historical and political concerns, social and economic problems, bleakness and disillusionment in life,

philosophical elements, and crime, reveal the inherent futility of the real world that pervades realistic literature. The magnum opus *The Human Comedy* series (1829-1847) written by Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) is an examination of the nature of individuals, their lives, social classes, moral struggles, ambition, desire, and the quest for identity in the French society within the context of the socio-political landscape of the French Revolution, records the earliest trace of realism in literature. Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) established realistic narration through the novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857) by exploring the discontentment of uneventful bourgeois life of the titular protagonist whose romantic aspirations and idealised dreams are in stark contrast of her life due to financial constraints and the societal expectation of women to be wives and mothers.

Writers of realistic fiction also write highly relatable works with plots woven around historical settings like the Great Depression, World Wars, Industrial Revolution, slums, and the harshness and brutality of the landscape. One of the most popular examples of realistic fiction that weaves plots around historical settings is *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Charles Dickens (1812-1870). It is set against the backdrop of the French Revolution and explores themes of resurrection, sacrifice, and the stark contrasts between social classes, vividly depicting the brutality of the era, making it a quintessential work of historical realism that resonates with readers through its relatable characters and dramatic events.

Over the centuries, literary realism has been classified into subgenres based on subject matters like naturalism in France, psychological realism in Russia and Germany, social realism in America with subsets like dirty realism and kitchen sink realism, kitchen sink realism in Britain, socialist realism in the Soviet Union, grunge lit, the subset of Australian realism, and magical realism in Latin America.

In the process of the search for truth and reality, familiarity is lifted from the real-world contexts and applied to non-realistic fiction, ushering a paradigm shift in literature with supernatural, futuristic, and imaginative themes. Non-realistic fiction conjures an atmosphere of surrealism and constructs a world through a process called worldbuilding by partnering the impossible settings with imaginary history, geography, ecology, different dimensions of time and space, non-existent technology, and invented languages. The imaginative framework of the potential of science and technology and progress of humans is utilised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century science fiction. In 1941, the science fiction writer Robert A. Heinlein coins the term “speculative fiction” and popularises it through the essay “On the Writing on Speculative Fiction” (1947) saying:

In the speculative science fiction story accepted science and established fiefs are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a new framework for human action. As a result of this new situation, new human problems are created—and our store is about how human beings cope with those new problems. (qtd. in Menadue et al. 3)

Speculative fiction is the creative sap of the non-mimetic vein that springs from the conjecture “what-if”, that talks about a futuristic or alternate world as in Margaret Atwood’s (1939- ) *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) that depicts a dystopian future that subjects women to reproductive slavery. Suzanne Collins’s (1962- ) *The Hunger Games* (2008) is set in a post-apocalyptic nation where children are forced to participate in an annual televised death match as punishment for a past rebellion against the government. Frank Herbert’s (1920-1986) *Dune* (1965) takes place in a distant future on a desert planet, exploring power struggles between empires to acquire a powerful drug, melange that extends lifespan, enhances mental abilities, and

enables space navigation. It is a fuzzy set super category which Marek C. Oziewicz in the article “Speculative fiction” (2017) finds that it “. . . is not defined by clear boundaries”, making it a tedious task of defining the genres (1). Speculative fiction is identified as a separate genre with science fiction and fantasy as brethren genres of overlapping characteristics. The plausibility of speculative fiction is absent in science fiction and it displays other world characteristics, incorporating technological prowess unknown to humanity like time travel, equipment to descent into the sea and volcano, and cybernetics and virtual reality, that may be feasible in the future as portrayed in monumental novels like H.G. Wells’s (1866-1946) *The Time Machine* (1895), Jules Verne’s (1828-1905) *The Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), and William Gibson’s (1948- ) *Neuromancer* (1984) respectively.

The fantasy genre traffics in the impossible and integrates magic and the supernatural into the narrative. The word “fantasy” originates from the Middle French word *fantasticus* meaning “existing only in imagination”, the Latin *phantasticus* or “imaginary”, and the Greek ‘phantastikos’, which means to “make visible”. The primary function of fantasy, as a creative art form is to induce aesthetic pleasure and entertain readers, both young and old – children, up to the age of thirteen years; young adults, from the age of thirteen to eighteen; new adults from the age of eighteen to thirty; and adults aged beyond thirty. It is disparaged due to the creative imagination involved as Peter Hunt et al. in the book, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* (2001) state that fantasy is frequently criticised as “. . . formulaic, childish, and escapist. . .” (2). The secondary function of the genre as a combination of instrument that is expressive and persuasive is to serve as a means of intellectual enlightenment, shape aesthetic taste of individuals, refine their personality, act as a civilising agent, and mock psychological coherence.

A deeper understanding of the genre fantasy can be acquired from a peep into its origin, which is rooted back to the folklore and literature of diverse cultures and civilisations. The ancient Greek epics, such as Homer's (c. 750 BCE) *Iliad* composed around c. 800 BCE to c. 700 BCE and Virgil's (70 BCE to 19 BCE) *Aeneid* written around 19 BCE, are foundational works in the fantasy genre, featuring fantastical tropes like the journeys of gallant heroes facing challenges, powerful prophecies, and mythical creatures. In the *Iliad*, the narrative centres on the Trojan War, showcasing characters like Achilles and Hector, whose struggles reflect themes of pride, fate, and heroism. The *Aeneid* follows Aeneas, a Trojan hero, on his journey from the ruins of Troy to Italy, where he is destined to establish a new homeland, intertwining themes of destiny and the founding of Rome.

Elements of fantasy, romance, suspense, comedy, mystery, horror, and transformation are present in Apuleius's (124 CE to 170 CE) *The Golden Ass* penned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, a tale of metamorphosis where a young man magically transforms into an ass. The influence of the novel is seen in Boccaccio's (1313-1375) *Decameron* compiled around 1353, a collection of tales told by ten people fleeing the plague, exploring themes of love, class, trickery, and morality through diverse characters and their interconnectedness over ten days, which incorporates stories from *The Golden Ass*, highlighting its lineage from ancient Italian folklore and myths. The Indian folklore *Panchatantra* traced to around 200 BCE convey moral lessons and principles of political science and features anthropomorphic fables with talking animals. *Baital Pachisi* composed around the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE is the magical tale of King Vikram and Betal, a spirit akin to a vampire, that showcases the blend of magic and morality and inspires other classical fantasy literature, including *One Thousand and One Nights*, often referred to as The Arabian Nights, that dates back to the 14<sup>th</sup> or

15<sup>th</sup> century CE, a collection of Middle Eastern folktales centred around the story of Scheherazade, a queen who narrates captivating stories to King Shahryar each night to delay her execution by leaving each tale unfinished until the following evening. The Arabian Nights weaves together various themes such as love, tragedy, and supernatural tales involving djinns, ghosts, sorcerers, and mystical places where the ordinary intermingles with the magical.

Cynewulf's *The Dream of the Rood* from the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, Geoffrey Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* composed in circa 1136 CE, and Layamon's *Brut* written between 1155 and 1190 CE are some of the earliest works of fantasy in Britain, that reflect the cultural transition from Paganism to Christianity, the formation of national identity, the rich tapestry of medieval literature that intertwines history and legend, and the shared interest of Anglo-Saxon elements of heroes, loyalty, and the exploits of heroes. *The Dream of the Rood* is an Old English poem that presents a dream vision of the cross which is personified as a loyal retainer to Christ, portrayed as a heroic warrior, who was crucified on it. The poem emphasises themes of sacrifice, redemption, and the intertwining of Christian and Pagan elements of reverence for nature and heroic warriors. *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut* are fictional histories that chronicle the lineage of British kings from the Trojans to the Anglo Saxons, merging historical accounts with mythological narratives, particularly focusing on the Arthurian legends, emphasising themes of heroism and cultural identity.

The forerunners of fantasy literature encompass a rich tapestry of texts from various cultures and time periods, each characterised by unique settings, supernatural elements, and legendary figures that have significantly contributed to the fantasy genre in terms of themes, characters, and narrative styles. The Fornaldarsagas, Norse sagas set in a mythic past, often featuring exotic locales and supernatural beings such

as elves, dwarves, and giants were composed between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. They draw on older oral traditions and reflect a blend of history and fantasy like *Völsunga saga*, which recounts the tale of Sigurd, a hero akin to Siegfried from the *Nibelungenlied*, and *Hervarar saga*, which incorporates elements of historical geography and legendary heroism. The narratives are often linear and episodic, focusing on the adventures of legendary figures while addressing deeper themes through a fantastical lens.

The Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* composed around 700 CE, centres on the battles of the titular hero against the monster Grendel, his mother, and a dragon. Set in Scandinavia, the poem delves into the themes of loyalty, heroism, and the battle against evil. Beowulf represents the ideal warrior, showcasing bravery and strength in the face of supernatural threats, which are integral to the narrative structure of the poem. *The Mabinogion*, a compilation of Welsh tales of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, includes stories of King Arthur and his knights, interwoven with Celtic mythology. These tales are rich in magical elements and feature characters like Pwyll and Rhiannon, emphasising themes of fate, honour, and the supernatural.

The Ulster Cycle consists of heroic legends from Irish mythology, focusing on the exploits of the warrior Cú Chulainn and the kingdom of Ulster. The tales highlight themes of bravery, fate, and the supernatural, often involving battles against formidable foes and mythical creatures. The Fenian Cycle features legendary figures such as Fionn mac Cumhaill and his band of warriors, the Fianna. The stories are often presented in the form of ballads and emphasise themes of heroism, loyalty, and the connection to nature with a strong presence of magical elements.

*Piers Plowman*, written by William Langland (c. 1332-1386 CE) in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, is a poem that follows the protagonist Will, as he encounters fantasy

elements (dream visions of allegorical figures), representing virtues and vices. The poem explores themes of morality and social justice and critiques contemporary society and religious practices. The *Travels*, of Sir John Mandeville (1300-1371), a 14<sup>th</sup> century book, is a narrative that recounts the adventures of the author through exotic lands, encountering fantastical creatures, and miraculous events like the presence of saints and biblical relics, which reveal a lack of unity in time and place in the text.

The fantasy genre has transitioned from being closely associated with medieval elements like castles, dragons, and fairies, brimming with magic, to mainstream literature, adopting a more agreeable and accessible image in the process. Fantasy as it is known today has been shaped by several other genres like juvenile literature, otherwise known as children's literature that surfaced during the World Wars and the Vietnam War.

Children's fantasy literature is a white-washed version of the literature for adults. Suman Gupta in the book, *Re-Reading Harry Potter* (2003), writes that though children are the primary readers of children's books, adults endorse them due to their nostalgic sentimentality of childhood (10). Patricia Encisco et al. in the article, "Children's Literature: Standing in the Shadow of Adults" (2010), state that the concerns expressed in the genre are delicately layered as ". . . straightforward stor[ies] of an undaunted journey from ignorance to knowledge" avoiding overt instruction and preaching ". . . moral or religious truth to telling a story – a shift from instruction to imagination and enjoyment" (254, 256).

Children's fantasy literature artfully embeds real-world concerns hidden in satire, social critique, and philosophy by imparting real-life concerns using the frame of a camouflaged version – "fictional reality", wherein fantasy and reality are either

congruent or an extension of each other. It is steered through a discussion of mature concerns like social relations, politics, freedom, knowledge, fairness, justice, and struggle for identity. Universal themes like love, death, knowledge, moral dilemma, following one's dream and adventure, bullying, and sketching characters in shades of grey rather than as good or evil are expressed in a recognisable, digestible format suitable for the sensibility of children to help them understand the realities through simple language and evocative illustrations.

Fantasy has taken many forms over the years before attaining its current generic form known as genre fantasy or contemporary fantasy, the roots of which dates back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modern fantasy differs from traditional fantasy like fairytales, myths, folklore, and legends with familiar motifs that elicit a strong sense of culture and remains an important component of the foundation of contemporary literature. Unlike traditional fantasy, modern fantasy has known authors whose original stories are not retellings but unique creations by paying homage to old stories in terms of characters, places, and motifs in the modern age fairytales.

Modern fantasy portrays secondary worlds that are entirely invented worlds, either separate from the real world or partly hidden within the real world. The fantasies are imbued with the supernatural and the hero's quest, magic, special objects, and time shifts. Detailed elements of make-believe like new rules and languages, unique physical laws, geography, and history allow “. . . readers to consider realistic themes” with real-world issues of the struggle between good vs. evil and the meaning of life and death “in a more appealing manner” (Kurkjian 429). In *Children's Literature, Briefly* (2008), Tunnell and Jacobs write that modern fantasy has:

. . . story elements that violate the natural, physical laws of our known world – events akin to magic. Some miraculous elements found in modern fantasy are talking animals, imaginary worlds, fanciful characters, magical beings, and so on. Some types of modern fantasy include the following: toys and objects imbued with life, tiny humans, peculiar characters and situations, imaginary worlds, magical powers, supernatural tales, time-warp fantasy, and high fantasy

spawning several subgenres over the years (412).

Fantasy, with the passing of each century, is metaphorically translated into reality through “. . . readable, culturally encoded set of . . . moral or psychological meanings” as stated by Sarah Gilead in the article “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction” (1991) (285). It occurs at the intersection of imaginative and political discourse where readers read books, are encouraged to engage in an author-reader transaction, and construct their own meaning. Mark Fabrizi in *Fantasy literature: Challenging Genres* (2016) asserts that fantasy builds “informed readers” by opening them a permissible choice to uncover hidden meanings and understand the power relationship between the author and the reader and not just decode the text. The portrayal of the existing social and political structures, hegemonic culture, racism, gender inequality and class divide, enable readers to position themselves within the text and to identify the culture they are subjected to, paving the way to an active dialogic exchange with the text as opposed to resistant reading by readers who effortlessly believe in the authority of the text. The perspective that fantasy brings on the relevance about the nature of good and evil, morality, the importance of cultural diversity, the afterlife, heroism, and the quality of one’s character enable readers to grow with wisdom and maturity. The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim conveys

that fantasy is a vital educational and philosophical tool essential for the psychological health of children, providing comfort and consolation concerning real-life problems. In the book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976), Bettelheim writes that children:

. . . intuitively comprehend that although these stories are un-real, they are not un-true; that while what these stories tell about does not happen in fact, it must happen as inner experience and personal development; that fairy tales depict in imaginary and symbolic form the essential steps in growing and achieving an independent existence. (73)

Fantasy can be a higher form of indulgence as it crosses over real-life situations. Fantasy worlds accommodate the awareness of the unfamiliar into the familiarity of the real world. In a shift from unreal to real, imagination works as the key that opens doors to the world of fantasy transforming the ordinary into extraordinary. Fantasy illuminates human minds with sparks of joy, wonder, curiosity, and doubts. It may be man's best friend or worst enemy, doomed to perish without clarity in imagination and must be carefully nurtured, channelled, disciplined, and used beneficially as required.

A blurry line exists between fantasy and reality. Fantasy sugar-coats the harsh realities of life, serving as a stress reliever that is refreshing and therapeutic. As a result, fantasy helps readers to deal with conflicts, solve problems, and encourages them to develop a more positive attitude with willing suspension of disbelief to escape from stressful situations by working hard to turn fantasies into realities. Occasionally, fantasy is the temporary fulfilment of ungratified desires accentuated through fictional modes in which readers are forced to confront their conflicts in a fictional reality by creating equally challenging social, physical, and cultural situations in imaginary

realms to fulfil their wishes. Fantasy and reality co-exist in the children's novels of the American writer, Rick Riordan (1964- ).

Richard Russell Riordan Jr., who writes under the pseudonym Rick Riordan, is a teacher turned writer, born in San Antonio, Texas. He worked for fifteen years in public and private schools before becoming a full-time writer. Riordan has created several companion books, short stories, and crossover series to help readers achieve a better grasp of the concepts, themes, characters, settings, and ideas of his books. He has collaborated on graphic novels which are illustrated versions of his novels. Riordan launched his imprint 'Rick Riordan Presents', to help publish works of authors who write about mythologies of various countries and cultures. He and his wife Becky Riordan have also founded their own production company Mythomagic, Inc., where both act as sole producers entitled to adapt Riordan's literary works into television and film.

Riordan launched his writing career with the publication of his debut novels, a series of seven mystery novels for adults called *Tres Navarre – Big Red Tequila* (1997), *The Widower's Two-Step* (1998), *The Last King of Texas* (2000), *The Devil Went Down to Austin* (2001), *Southtown* (2004), *Mission Road* (2005), and *Rebel Island* (2007). The series follows the life of the titular protagonist, Tres Navarre, an unlicensed private detective, who investigates the mystery of the unsolved murder of his father. Riordan's *Cold Springs* (2004), is a crime thriller about a man, who tries to save a teenage girl from drug addiction and also from a murderer.

Riordan debuted writing for children and young adults with his breakthrough fantasy-adventure series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians – The Lightning Thief* (2005), *The Sea of Monsters* (2006), *The Titan's Curse* (2007), *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008), *The Last Olympian* (2009), *The Chalice of Gods* (2023), and *Wrath*

*of the Triple Goddess* (2024). The series portrays an interwoven primary world of mortals and secondary world of Greek mythology in which modern day American kids experience a life of fantasy adventures. The companion books which help readers to grasp the concepts, themes, characters, settings, and ideas of the original works are *Percy Jackson: Camp Half-Blood Confidential* (2017), *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods* (2014), *Percy Jackson's Greek Heroes* (2015), and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Ultimate Guide* (2009). The illustrated versions of the novels called graphic novels are *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief: The Graphic Novel* (2010), *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters: The Graphic Novel* (2013), *Percy Jackson and The Titan's Curse: The Graphic Novel* (2013), *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth: The Graphic Novel* (2018), and *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian: The Graphic Novel* (2019).

The events of the first five novels in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* are followed by its sequel *Heroes of Olympus*, a pentalogy – *The Lost Hero* (2010), *The Son of Neptune* (2011), *The Mark of Athena* (2012), *The House of Hades* (2013), and *The Blood of Olympus* (2014). The series is crafted around the parallel existence of the Greek and Roman mythological realms of mythical beings, locales, and artefacts with the real world, depicting the similarities and differences between the two civilisations. Its companion books are *The Demigod Diaries* (2012) and *Demigods of Olympus* (2015) and the graphic novels are *The Lost Hero: The Graphic Novel* (2014) and *The Son of Neptune: The Graphic Novel* (2017).

Riordan's third series, a trilogy *The Kane Chronicles – The Red Pyramid* (2010), *The Throne of Fire* (2011), and *The Serpent's Shadow* (2012), is a reprise of the Egyptian mythology. The retelling revolves around two interracial siblings who lead their lives, oblivious of their true identities as magicians, descended from

Egyptian pharaohs. The kids are drawn away from their normal lives to assist the Egyptian gods in saving the world from plunging into perpetual darkness. *Brooklyn House Magician's Manual* (2018) is the companion book and the graphic novels are *The Red Pyramid: The Graphic Novel* (2012), *The Throne of Fire: The Graphic Novel* (2015), and *The Serpent's Shadow: The Graphic Novel* (2017). Riordan's crossover books, with same characters and settings from *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* and *The Kane Chronicles*, are *Demigods and Magicians – The Son of Sobek* (2013), *The Staff of Serapis* (2014), and *Crown of Ptolemy* (2015).

Riordan's next trilogy *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard – The Sword of Summer* (2015), *The Hammer of Thor* (2016), and *The Ship of the Dead* (2017), is based on Norse mythology, featuring a sixteen-year-old boy, the son of a Norse deity, who dies in a supernatural fight and enters Valhalla, the Norse realm of dead warriors, with a pre-destined task to delay Ragnarok or Doomsday. The companion book of *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* is *Hotel Valhalla: Guide to the Norse Worlds* (2016).

Riordan's pentalogy *The Trials of Apollo – The Hidden Oracle* (2016), *The Dark Prophecy* (2017), *The Burning Maze* (2018), *The Tyrant's Tomb* (2019), and *The Tower of Nero* (2020), is based on Greek and Roman mythologies. It follows the tale of the son of the God Apollo, who is banished to Earth to live like a mortal teenager and fulfil his increasingly difficult quest to regain his godly powers. *Camp Jupiter Classified* (2020) is the companion book.

Riordan's novel, *The Maze of Bones* (2008), is the first novel of the five-series mystery-adventure novel collection *39 Clues* (2008 - 2016), featuring a total of twenty-six novels by various authors. The select novels revolve around the

protagonists who are forced to go on a treasure hunt around the world and solve thirty-nine clues in order to become the most powerful person in the world.

Riordan's *Daughter of the Deep* (2021) is inspired from Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1875) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (1871) and is a stand-alone science-fiction novel which revolves around the premise that Captain Nemo's adventures are based on true events and that he has invented several technologies with the potential to change the world. Nemo conceals it to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands of his rival which is continued by his descendant, the protagonist Ana Dakkar who fights to stop their rivals from abusing the technology.

### **Selection of the Primary Texts**

The study explores the confluence of the fantastical Greek mythical world alongside the ordinary modern-day America, as fantasy and reality coincide in the first five volumes of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (PJO) – *The Lightning Thief* (TLT), *The Sea of Monsters* (TSoM), *The Titan's Curse* (TTC), *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (TBoL), and *The Last Olympian* (TLO). *The Chalice of Gods* and *the Wrath of the Triple Goddess* are omitted from the analysis as they were not published at the time of writing the thesis and also depart from the progression of the original narrative of PJO, which was initially conceived as a pentalogy. The select novels demonstrate that magic in the mythological world is equivalent to technology in the mortal world. Riordan conceives the idea for the series from the bedtime stories told to his son, Haley Riordan. The twelve-year-old protagonist, Percy Jackson, is an ink-and-paper twin of Haley as both are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia.

Riordan writes with his students in mind, to promote inclusivity of children with emotional, intellectual, physical, cultural, and social differences, varied ethnicities, race, neurodiversity, financial and familial backgrounds, and discourages marginalisation or pathology. He states in an interview that “Every child can be a hero. No child should be ashamed or shunned for being different” (“An Interview with Rick”). According to him, it is imperative that children get to know Greek myths in order to understand the modern Western culture and its roots (“Frequently Asked Questions”). The select works are a recycled version of Greek myths in which the author relocates the tradition and culture of the ancient Greek civilisation into the retelling. The novels allude to Greek gods, heroes, mythological creatures, magical relics, and locales in classical Greek mythology with a mesmerising blend of magic, action, adventure, and mystery, lending the novels the magnificence of ancient myths. It projects real-world concerns like empowerment, reformism, identity, and moral ambiguity.

Percy’s dyslexia distinguishes him from the conventional ideal of the perfect hero, making him more relatable as an individual with flaws and still succeeds. Percy lives an ordinary life unaware of his identity and discovers that he is a demigod born to his mortal mother Sally Jackson and the Greek God Poseidon. His new demigod identity entails that he belongs to two worlds – the mortal world, and the Greek mythological world camouflaged with the mortal world. Percy is taken from the mortal world to Camp Half-Blood, situated under Mount Olympus, the safe haven for demigods which looks like a regular estate in a vast valley to the mortal eyes. In the camp, demigods are trained in swordfight, archery, and wrestling to hone their natural abilities that they have gained from their godly parents. The ability of the demigods to read ancient Greek is concealed under the guise of dyslexia and ADHD becomes

advantageous, giving them battlefield reflex while they fight evil forces, withstand continual monster attacks, and embark on dangerous quests. Percy's mythical adventures begin with his mission to restore the master bolt of Zeus, Lord of the Sky which adds momentum to fulfilling his ultimate goal. As foretold by an ancient prophecy, his destiny is to save the world by defeating the archvillain Kronos, a power-hungry Titan, and to restore peace to Olympus, the heavenly abode of the Olympians.

### **Rationale for the selection of the Primary Texts**

The selection of the select novels of Rick Riordan's PJO is rooted in its unique interweaving of classical mythology with real-world themes like bullying, insecurities about body image, self-perception, jealousy, egotism, impulsiveness, teenage angst, neurodiversity, loneliness, identity, death, strong female characterisations, friendship, family, romantic relationships, and ecological concerns, grouped into the categories – emotional/psychological, social, and ethical concerns for analytical clarity. The select novels operate with reference to the human condition in meaningful ways, and while imaginative, easily lend themselves to critical engagement with real-world issues.

The select novels lean heavily on historical, moral, and cultural frameworks. The historical framework is the legacy of Greek mythology used in the select novels which draws directly from the journeys of the mythical heroes, Theseus, Perseus, Odysseus, Hercules, and Achilles. Rather than preserving them as static archetypes, Riordan intersperses the hero myths into Percy's life in present day America, with gods, demigods, and mythical creatures on the prowl hidden from the mortal sight and continues the mythic framework. The moral framework in the select novels is steeped in moral dilemmas like loyalty vs. betrayal, duty vs. personal freedom, and

faith vs. agency, suggesting that there is no absolute good or evil, as gods and heroes, and the heroes choose the kind of personalities they desire. The moral framework that is individualistic, fluid, and ethically grey, reflects that young readers of today experience a world of moral uncertainty. The select novels respond to cultural and psychological framework through blended families, single parents, abandonment, neurodiversity like ADHD and dyslexia, not as deficits but divine traits, ethnic, racial, gender diversity, and mental health and trauma, where mythology becomes a narrative therapy helping readers process grief, marginalisation, and self-worth. The placement of ancient myths in dialogue with modern identity has made the classical mythic content emotionally and socially relevant to young readers. Hence, mythology functions not merely as a backdrop but as a transformative lens through which young readers negotiate historical continuity, moral complexity, and personal growth.

The select novels enable a rich terrain for analysis offering not only entertainment but also layered discourse on emotional/psychological, social, ethical, and pedagogical concerns. In particular, the select novels resonate strongly with the Indian academic and social context where myth continues to serve as both a moral compass and cultural memory by recalling and repurposing the fantastical form of Greek mythological archetypes, rituals, and narrative patterns in the reality of contemporary settings. The dialogic engagement prompts readers to reinterpret ancient symbols in modern times, sustaining the continuity of cultural memory while inviting new readings of classical structures that turns the Greek pantheon into a dynamic system that grows alongside its readership, bridging ancient collective memory and current cultural identity. Cultural memory is not a focus of the current study; it shows the reactivation of mythic structures in contemporary settings. Riordan's modern mythopoeia, therefore is not a distant Western fantasy but a cross-

cultural dialogic space where global readers including Indian readers find relevance and reflection.

The select novels provide a fertile ground for literary analysis rooted in contemporary critical frameworks. The study does not claim that Riordan's work alone engages deeply with emotional/psychological, social, ethical concerns, myth, memory, and identity, rather it offers a particular platform to analyse the re-imagination of mythological frameworks through the lens of the genre of contemporary children's fantasy. The genre tackles the convergence of fantasy and reality, but Riordan's engagement with Greek classical myths, specifically tailored for modern young readers, interrogates the overlap between myths and contemporary values. Although the study does not undertake a comparative analysis of contemporary fantasy, it situates the select works within a larger tradition of the 21<sup>st</sup> century children's literature. It includes works by several contemporary fantasy authors who do not just deliver diverse tone and structure, but also collectively portray a shift in fantasy literature toward more nuanced explorations of psychological depth, identity, and morality.

Riordan's strategic use of ancient mythologies to entertain and ethically orient a generation of young readers distinguishes him from other authors. Recasting ancient Greek myths into a postmodern multicultural American setting, his use of a flawed, self-aware, adolescent hero, combined with overt references to learning disabilities, identities, and systemic dysfunction makes the select novels of PJO, a compelling site to explore not only the reworking of myths but the rewriting of childhood, subjectivity, and moral agency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where agency refers to the capacity of characters, especially, the young demigods, to make choices, assert control over their lives, and influence their environments despite external constraints. The thesis

argues for inclusivity, and Riordan's works provide an ideal corpus to explore the shifting dynamics of myth, morality, and modern identity in post millennial children's fantasy.

### **Problem Statement**

The study interrogates how contemporary fantasy literature, specifically the select novels negotiate the boundaries between myth and modernity, where the negotiation shapes the understanding of the lived reality of readers through the emotional/psychological, social, and ethical dimensions, as well as the agency of characters. The portrayal, in turn, affects readers' perception of their own potential to navigate and respond to real-world challenges, though reader response criticism is not one among the primary focuses of the current study.

The research problem lies in examining the ways in which re-imagined classical myths are localised and contemporised to speak to present day readers, and the fusion influences narrative structure, character development, and reader reception, pertaining to their ethical, emotional, and cultural consciousness. The thesis asserts that fantasy is not merely escapist, but is consciously reflective of social realities and evolving forms of heroism. Without a literary critical investigation grounded in postmodern theory, the deeper narrative strategies and significance of the text remain unexplored.

### **Review of Literature**

The current study reviews previous research on the select novels from various journals and research studies which are categorised according to plot and narrative structures, archetypal representation of characters and events, and theoretical approaches. Retno Wulandari, in the research paper, "Formula Analysis in JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson*

*and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief: A Comparative Study on Fantasy Fiction*” (2010), analyses *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (1997) and the select novels of PJO in terms of the formulaic structure that includes worldbuilding, character archetypes, the journey of the hero, narrative structure, magical objects, and action motives. Wulandari draws on the assertion of Kellynn Gates that consistency, originality, the capacity to induce wonder, vivid setting, and style influence the success of fantasy. The researcher writes that fantasy is formulaic but liberates people from the weight of their problems, which aligns with the view that fantasy serves as a structured genre and a psychological outlet. Wulandari’s focus remains largely structural, with limited engagement regarding the re-imagination of the structures in the contemporary context.

Dani Irawan’s study, *Structural Analysis of Plot in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2015), is a plain analysis of the plot structure using Greimas’s structuralism. Similarly, Astri Supriyati’s study *Representation of Greek Myth and Fantasy in Rick Riordan’s Novel Percy Jackson and The Sea of Monsters* (2020) adopts a structural lens to investigate the interaction of myth and fantasy in the novel and identifies mist as the major element that allows the author to normalise the mythological world in modern-day America, distinguishing it from the mythical aspects of the book. M. Hilman Rasyid Yudistira’s study, *The Concept of Hero in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2017), is an analysis of the plot structure using Vladimir Propp’s structure of narratology that illustrates Riordan’s crafting of a modern hero that surrounds the traditional myths. The studies, collectively contribute to an understanding of Riordan’s adaptation of classical plots through relatable narrative frameworks, fusing fantasy and current reality, which are aspects that matches the

objectives of the current study. The studies, however, focus narrowly on one structural framework each and do not explore broader dimensions.

Emily Chiang's research paper, "The Adventure of the Hero Percy Jackson: An Analysis of the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* Series" (2011), is an investigation of the plot structure using Campbell's theory of the hero's journey to examine Percy's development as a classical hero. Mohammed Sugeng Rahman Hakim's study, *An Analysis of Monomyth through Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief* (2015), is an analysis of the novel using Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey to find similarities between Campbell's theory and Percy's monomyth in the novel, wherein the researcher concludes that the obstacles faced by the mythical heroes can be viewed as metaphors for the issues faced by people in real life. The works remain within the bounds of traditional heroic structure and do not analyse the nuances of narrative experimentation.

Alexander Leighton's research paper, "Reawakening the Myth: Retelling the Hero Journey in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*" (2014), is an exploration of the select novels using Joseph Campbell's theory of the journey of the hero as described in Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope's *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* (1981). Leighton elaborates on Riordan's subversion of the patriarchal notions of the "hero" by giving voice to the female character Annabeth who matches the male hero Percy not only in physical strength but also surpasses him intellectually, concluding that the author redesigns the characters and focalisation in the novels which is inclusive of adolescent representation, making it relevant to the modern audience.

In the research paper, "Re-Discovering Mythology: Adaptation and Appropriation in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* Saga" (2014), Leighton

analyses the novels to be a re-version adhering to the archetypal narrative of the pre-text of ancient Greek myths that Riordan places in the social and cultural geography of contemporary times. The researcher concludes that the re-imagined understanding of the ancient myths through contemporary events in the novels helps to pique children's interest in classical Greek myths. Leighton successfully contextualises the series within mythological and feminist frameworks, but his works largely remain focused on myth adaptation and character arcs. Mir Md. Fazle Rabbi's research paper, "*Percy Jackson and the Olympians: Reincarnation of Greek Mythology as an Alternate Reality*" (2016), is an analysis of the retelling using Marxist theory with a depiction of demigods as proletariats and gods as bourgeoisie. Rabbi concludes that mythology can be used as an effective tool to convey that humanity has the power to keep evil forces at bay. The study is a valuable contribution to socio-political interpretations of the text that centres class and power structures, but it does not engage with narrative innovations. Maia Anne Swanson's study, *The Myth Continues in Percy Jackson: A Look into Mythology and its Persistence Today* (2014), is an approach to the novels as the continuation of ancient myths like *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (8 BCE) which entertain and inform readers about human follies. The study affirms the cultural endurance of Greek mythology and highlights Riordan's role in reviving the classical tales for the modern audience, but offers limited analysis of narrative techniques that mediate the transformation of the myths.

Mi Zandelin's study, *Making a Hero: Vogler's Supportive and Opposing Archetypes in Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2019), examines the supportive and opposing character archetypes who aid development of Percy in the novel. The researcher analyses the archetypes using the dramatic structure and the hero archetype proposed by Christopher Vogler and effectively demonstrates that the supportive

character archetypes influence the self-esteem and selflessness of Percy, and the opposing character archetypes enhance his confidence and awareness. The study contributes to Percy's moral and psychological evolution throughout the narrative, but limits the larger implications of his journey.

Julie Smit, in the research paper "How Fantasy Speaks to Adolescent Readers: The Development of Gender Equity, Heroism and Imperfection, and Good and Evil from an Exploration into Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* and *Heroes of Olympus Series*" (2020), discusses themes like gender inequality, heroism, imperfection, and the conflict between good and evil. The research paper documents the responses from interactions with female adolescent readers regarding the characters and events in the novels and indicates the groundbreaking nature of its complex plot and psychologically deep characters. The study shows that the select novels convey positive signals into the minds of young readers to be optimistic about their abilities and ultimately their identities. The novels, being a contemporary mythical narrative, teach the importance of social behaviour through the characters. Most often readers are inspired by fictitious characters, especially from mythology as heroes are portrayed in an unfailingly perfect light. Smit offers valuable insights into reader engagement and gender representation, but does not delve into the structural or stylistic aspects that contribute to the thematic representations.

Shelby Ward, in the study *Demigods and Diversity: A Critical Analysis of Diversity and Representation in the Books of Rick Riordan* (2017), discusses the representation of characters who are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation in Rick Riordan's *PJO*, *The Kane Chronicles*, *The Heroes of Olympus*, *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*, and *The Trials of Apollo*. The researcher sheds light on the variety of Riordan's characters which represent various

religious and familial backgrounds, the cultural ramifications of racism, complex emotional arcs, gender expectations, social image of beauty and stereotypes of physical attributes, roles played by female characters, female friendships, homelessness, and disabilities. The researcher highlights the issues portrayed by Riordan and evaluates the impacts and outcomes of the works and sums up that Riordan purposefully employs diversity to create an inclusive universe for readers of all ages. The study commends the deliberate effort of Riordan to construct a multicultural and emotionally nuanced narrative space that fosters inclusivity and reader identification, but does not foreground the text in narrative strategies or literary theories.

Mirzaeva Aziza Shavkatovna's research article, "Allusion as The Way of Rendering Elements of Ancient Greek Mythology in The Tissue of Modern Literature" (2021), explores the intertextual references of PJO in the light of postmodernism. The researcher explores three intertextual forms – allusion, quote, and reminiscence, which add to the meaning of the text and contribute to the continuity of the literary tradition. Awanda Eki Safitri's research article, "The Relation of Journey in Rick Riordan's *The Sea of Monster* and Homer's *The Odyssey* translated by Samuel Butler" (2013), is a comparison of the novels using the concept of intertextuality. Both studies use intertextual lens that contribute to the continuity and evolution of the literary tradition of ancient myths repurposed for modern readers, but there is limited engagement with reader reception and genre repositioning, particularly in the content of children's fantasy literature.

Anusha Prasannan's research article, "Mythology Deconstructed: Tracing the Postmodern Elements in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Bolt*" (2019), uses postmodern literary devices and theories and themes to demonstrate that

the popular fiction novel is a literary work that blurs the lines between highbrow literature that is characterised by its intellectual depth and complexity, often requiring active engagement from the reader, and lowbrow literature that is more accessible and typically designed for passive consumption, focusing on entertainment rather than depth. Prasannan states that a postmodern approach helps to increase the popularity of the select novels and map it in the canon of meritorious literature. The article asserts the literary value of the text through the application of postmodern concepts, but focuses on a single text and does not engage in narrative strategies or reader engagement.

### **Research Gap**

Previous studies have probed into socio-cultural impact of the select novels by incorporating a conversation about the themes of race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, ecology, intertextuality, mythological recreation, and traces of postmodernism, but the narrative has not been analysed as an intersection of literature, psychology, and sociology, focusing on fantasy, reality, plot structures, and narrative techniques using the concepts of postmodernism, which are as dynamic as the genre of study.

The study fills academic, thematic, cultural, and social gaps. Contemporary children's fantasy narratives, especially the select novels, contribute to the academic discourse and to the non-Western vantage point, positioning the study in a global context. The current study pertains to American or Western texts, but does not foreground region specific cultural critiques or Indian literary parallels. In many academic spaces, fantasy literature like the select novels is seen as light reading and not literary. The research asserts that children's fantasy is a serious ethical space in the formation of identities as far as the social gap is concerned.

The study extends the academic value of Riordan's select novels beyond its original narrative intent, where Riordan primarily aims to engage and educate young

readers. The thesis critically situates the select novels within postmodern literary discourse, mythological reinterpretation, and children's personality development, alongside addressing contemporary concerns – emotional/psychological, social, ethical, and pedagogical – bringing the select novels into serious academic dialogue, transforming it from a popular cultural product to critical literary enquiry.

The research reveals that Riordan's works challenge traditional power structures especially divine vs. mortal, adults vs. child, and male vs. female, through the portrayal of characters, making them active agents of change and not passive recipients of myth. The research also examines Riordan's subversion of classical archetypes, introduction of multidimensional characters who blend traditional and contemporary traits, and the re-imagination of mythological archetypes suited to modern complexities. The study critically maps the archetypal evolutions through structural frameworks, shows that contemporary hierarchies like gender, age, authority, and race are re-imagined in the retelling, and ties them to postmodern shifts where traditional binaries like good/evil, hero/villain, and mortal/divine collapse through characters who blur conventional roles of the emotionally nuanced hero, intellectually dominant female warriors, morally ambiguous gods, and misunderstood monsters.

### **Significance of the Study**

The innovation of the study lies in the combination of conventional plot structures and postmodern approaches in the select to examine the reconfiguration of classical Greek myths into a modern myth that engages young readers, showcasing that myth becomes flexible and accessible to readers. It charts the narrative structure and character archetypes and identifies deviations that help to track the patterns of the traditional myth structures that Riordan follows and breaks, subverting traditional

archetypes, revising heroic ideals with a narrative that remains anchored in fantasy adventures. It also departs from moralistic readings by adopting a critical approach rooted in close reading that illuminates the evolving nature of the fantasy genre. The select novels have received pedagogical attention, but the current study explores them as literary texts that redefine Greek myths in a postmodern context.

The research presents a significant methodological innovation by combining traditional literary critical models with postmodern analysis, creating a framework that can be applied to other myth-inspired contemporary fantasy works. The study is on a Western children's fantasy series, but the reading lens is positioned to include scholars outside the Western academic mainstream, which gives it a transcultural dimension, though not overtly comparative. The emotional/ psychological, social, and ethical themes are not studied in isolation but interlaced with the plot and characters of the select novels.

The interdisciplinary elements in the thesis pertain to literature, psychology, mythology, education, and media and cultural studies. Psychology is explored, particularly in the exploration of identity formation and emotional development of characters that connects the literary analysis of the texts with child and adult psychology which makes their work relevant to psychological studies. In connection to mythology, Greek myths, its archetypes, and mythic structures have been squeezed into a postmodern children's narrative context. Education or pedagogy is significant in terms of the application of the texts in classrooms. The analysis relates to media and cultural studies as it analyses the localisation of ancient myths for contemporary readers and the effect media culture and fantasy has on real life. The thesis engages with myth criticism postmodern literary theory, thereby contributing to a broader academic conversation that spans multiple fields of knowledge. It invites future

scholars, educators, and cultural critics to explore the function of children's literature as a dynamic site where myth, morality, and modern identity coalesce.

### **Objectives**

The research aims to establish a link between fantasy/fictional reality and readers' reality to:

- i. Investigate the role of literature in bridging the gap between fantasy and reality.
- ii. Evaluate the plot structural changes and narrative strategies that redesign traditional storytelling methods in the select novels.
- iii. Attempt to relieve fantasy literature of its secondary status as it contributes to the continuum of meaning in literature.
- iv. Analyse the positive impacts of the fictional reality in the select novels on the social reality of readers in a less confrontational manner.
- v. Examine the construction and representation of myths in contemporary children's fantasy literature in accordance with the society's current intellectual, social, and cultural trends.

### **Research Methodology and Literary Framework**

Methodology advocated by 9<sup>th</sup> edition of MLA Handbook is followed for the purpose of documentation and citation. The study is a qualitative, textual, interpretative, and thematic analysis, grounded in close reading of the select novels, not involving quantitative data. The current study does not propose a new structural model, rather draws upon established frameworks which are employed not as prescriptive models, but as interpretative tools to analyse the primary texts. The research employs postmodern theoretical framework and aims to dispel preconceived ideas about children's fantasy literature by considering contemporary trends in the

genre that reflect the social and political landscape of the global community.

The elements of fantasy in the select novels are presented realistically, but the fictitious atmosphere serves as a purgatory or limbo between children's fantasy literature and the literature for adults, and also between the realms/concepts of fantasy and reality, where fantasy in the books attain meaning when it relates to readers' reality. The catalysts that bridge the gap between the two concepts are the worldbuilding and narrative strategies utilised by Riordan. He uses magical realism to depict supernatural or unreal things as a natural part of an otherwise ordinary setting, establishing a new reality for the mythological world with self-referential laws that challenge the notions of time, space, and identity within the parameters of its reality. The study employs "fantasy" and "fictional reality", "reality" and "readers' reality", and "limbo" in specific terms wherein "fantasy" and "fictional reality" denote a realm that transcends reality due to the incorporation of supernatural, magical, mythical, and unreal elements in the select novels. Fantasy is not escapist, but functions as a narrative tool that reflects and critiques real-world concerns. "Reality" and "readers' reality", refers to social, cultural, intellectual or pedagogical, emotional/ psychological, and ethical dimensions of the real world or readers' reality. In the study, fantasy and reality intersect to mirror the contemporary world. "Limbo" is used to describe the in-between space of fantasy and reality and the distinction in literature for children and adults.

The current study in the select novels from PJO analyses the aspects of fantasy and reality, examines the influence of the select novels, and determines the corresponding applicability of the genre using postmodern literary theory as it is a mode of discourse with stifling boundaries that are porous and ever-expanding like the fantasy genre. The postmodern concepts of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva (1941-) and incredulity towards metanarratives by Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-

1998) are used to examine the elements of fantasy and myth used by Riordan as a tool for storytelling. The structure of plot and narrative techniques are compared and contrasted to trace the manipulation of the old structure by Riordan to accommodate socially relevant themes, illustrate the atmosphere of fantasy and the illusion of reality, and discuss real-life postmodern themes, using incredulity towards metanarratives.

The concepts of postmodernism are used to collate the shift in the structure of classical Greek myths from conventionality to contemporaneity, examine the inclusion of socially relevant perspectives by Riordan in the texts using the universality of the myths, and instantiate the emergence of a new functional structure, that impact readers in social, cultural, and psychological spheres. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks, namely, Gustav Freytag's (1816-1895) 'Freytag pyramid', Northrop Frye's (1912-1991) criticism of myth, John Gardner's (1933-1982) 'Fichtean Curve', Tzvetan Todorov's (1939-2017) narrative theory of equilibrium, Vladimir Propp's (1895-1970) narrative structure, Joseph Campbell's 'monomyth' or the hero's journey, John Clute's (1940- ) structure of fantasy, Christopher Vogler's (1949- ), and Algirdas Julien Greimas's (1917-1992) actantial model have been included for analysis as they aid in connecting the elements of fantasy in the series with the everyday reality of readers. Drawing upon universal narrative patterns and archetypes, the study elucidates that the fantastical adventures of the characters in the select novels are underpinned by fundamental human themes like courage, identity, friendship, and the quest for self-discovery that are relatable to readers from varied personal experiences and cultural backgrounds to see reflections of their own lives and struggles within the mythical narrative, fostering a deeper engagement with the novels. The synthesis of insights from various conventional plot structural models

that represents diverse cultural and disciplinary perspectives on the narrative construction aims to provide a nuanced interpretation of the structure and character development of the narrative, enriching the understanding of the literary artistry, an integration and reinterpretation of classical mythological motifs within a modern framework.

Stephenie Yearwood in the article, “Popular Postmodernism for Young Adult Readers: Walk Two Moons, Holes, and Monster” (2002) states that intertextuality is a central concept in postmodern fiction with:

. . . the notion that texts or narratives set up dialogues with other texts, either. . . previously-written literary texts or other stories, creating new stories in the interstices and frictions and contradictions of various other stories. . . well-suited to raising and exploring some of the oldest themes of the genre: identity, self-fashioning, and self-knowledge. (50-51)

The current study views intertextuality according to the idea of Julia Kristeva that any work of art is an intertext which is a text that is related:

. . . other texts and rewrites, transforms or parodies them. Intertextuality suggests a range of links between a text and other texts emerging in diverse forms as direct quotation, citation, allusion, reference, imitation, collage, parody, pastiche, literary conventions, structural parallelism, and all kinds of sources either consciously exploited or unconsciously reflected. By doing so, an intertext transforms or reproduces the texts preceding it. (Zengin 1)

The intertextuality in the select novels can be explained in terms of the concept, pastiche, as it is a paste or mixture of several subgenres like mythological retellings,

fantasy adventure, magical realism, coming-of-age stories, making it a subject of the pluralistic protean nature of postmodernism.

The select novels are discussed in the context of the hybridity of characters as it features anthropomorphic and zoomorphic hybrid characters that are dichotomies of man-god and man-beast like demigods, centaurs, and gorgons. They exhibit linguistic hybridisation, also known as self-reflexivity of language in postmodern terms, due to the informal style of narration, mimicking the everyday conversation of children by using colloquial language, sprinkled with sarcasm and humour. A casual, playful narrative experience is aesthetically woven into the select novels to maintain contemporaneity and simplicity as opposed to the grandnarratives of the classical Greek myths. The select novels exhibit the characteristics of metafiction, a concept of postmodernism that draws attention to its status as a fictional work, often breaking traditional narrative conventions and exploring the relationship between fiction and reality.

The select novels are mininarratives that subvert the pre-existing classical form, structure, tropes, and techniques of the metanarratives, which Jean Francois Lyotard characterises as “totalising” formulaic narrative patterns, fixed prototypes, rigid genre boundaries, restricted space for innovation and self-legitimacy, and its authoritarian nature, inviting mistrust towards itself (xxiv). The concept is used in the study to exemplify multiple realistic perspectives in the select works to highlight that the novels do not change the foundation of ancient myths. Linda Hutcheon’s (1947- ) theory of Historiographic Metafiction describes a type of fiction that is both self-aware (metafictional) and deeply rooted in historical context (historical). It challenges the traditional distinction between history and fiction by presenting history as a narrative constructed through subjective interpretation rather than an objective

recounting of facts. Historiographic Metafiction often deconstructs established historical narratives, revealing their inherent biases and the impossibility of an entirely objective truth. The current study mirrors the way Historiographic Metafiction is used by Hutcheon as it reflects a multifaceted and interpretative approach, highlighting different viewpoints of characters, their personal backgrounds, social contexts, and cultural influences in the select novels, often intertwining with historical events with fictional accounts to create a shared cultural heritage, inspired from Greek myths that provide a sense of identity and continuity for a community even if the events in the novels are embellished or symbolic rather than strictly factual.

### **Thesis Statement**

The dual world construction and juxtaposition of fantasy and reality in Rick Riordan's select novels are explored to bridge the gap between the two through an examination of the structural elements employed in ancient Greek mythological tales which are transcribed to contemporary reality in a way that brings a positive cultural, psychological, and sociological impact on readers.

### **Chapter Outline**

The study titled "**Fantasy and Reality at Crossroads: Exploring Mythical and Mortal Worlds in Select Novels of Rick Riordan**" is divided into five chapters. The first chapter "**Introduction**" explores imagination as the beginning of creation which paves the way for storytelling as it is the foundation of written literature. It presents a backdrop of the evolution of fantasy fiction from the ancient to its present form. The rationale behind the selection of the primary texts have been explained. The relevance of the select works is discussed by introducing a gist of the select novels, juxtaposing fantasy and reality in the novel, and examining the interlaced elements. The chapter elucidates the problem statement, reviews significant literature

associated with the topic, locates a research gap, elaborates on the significance of the study, illustrates the objectives of the study, explains the methodology and the concepts of the theoretical framework used to analyse the select novels, states the thesis statement, and gives an outline of the chapters in the thesis.

The second chapter titled “**Breaking the Mould: Examining Structural Evolution**” is an exposé of the strategies used by Rick Riordan in the construction of a culturally relevant narrative. The retelling of Greek mythological tales and the transmutation of myths in the select novels result in the replay of old stories in a new light which is different from the previously imposed pattern and structure of ancient myths. The chapter explores conventionality vs. modernity of structure in the select novels through an analysis of the conventional plot structural models, Gustav Freytag’s Pyramid, Northrop Frye’s myth criticism, John Gardner’s Fichtean Curve, Tzvetan Todorov’s narrative theory of equilibrium, Vladimir Propp’s narrative structure, Joseph Campbell’s hero’s monomyth, John Clute’s structure of fantasy, and Christopher Vogler’s Mythic Structure, and the character functions put forth by Propp, Vogler, and Algirdas Julien Greimas which is called as the actantial model. The beginning, middle, and end of each model are compared with the plot structure of each of the novels selected and the subplots are identified.

The chapter explores the re-enactment of Greek mythological tales in a modern setting in the select novels which feature, characters from the ancient myths and new characters created by Riordan, including gods, monsters, and demigods. The chapter also delves into character functions and emphasises the presence of realistic, multidimensional characters rooted in a modern setting within the select novels which differ from the characters found in conventional plot structures. The re-enactment is juxtaposed with the old and new mythical tales by subverting certain details and

replacing them with new, sometimes, modernised details that hint at the challenge of the conventional plot structural models as well as the metanarratives, which are the Greek myths.

The narrative depth and the contemporary relevance of the select novels are conveyed through an examination of the intertextual references and the subversion of Greek myths/metanarratives. The chapter highlights the successful attempt of Rick Riordan at bridging the gap between myth and fantasy as well as the fictional reality of the narrative and the reality of readers by bringing the myths and the select novels closer to contemporary readers.

The third chapter titled “**Unravelling the Magic: Exploring Narrative Techniques**” is an inquiry into the narrative style of the select novels and its departure from a formulaic structure. It examines the narrative techniques such as focalisation, chronology, the opening and ending of the select novels, and language at play which are used to subvert the conventional method of storytelling, employing metafiction, a concept of postmodernism. An investigation of the traces of metafiction in the select novels includes a discussion on the plurality of narratives and the diversity of experiences presented in the select novels, challenging the idea of a single ultimate truth or objective reality, encourages the rejection of a single, dominating perspective or worldview and promotes ‘decentering’ of the narrative. The select novels blend elements of fantasy and reality while emphasising on verisimilitude through the elaboration of techniques like syntax fragmentation, playful language with verbal puns, parody, satire, sarcasm, irony, and humour. The intricacies of narration are explored through internal and external focalisations, leading to a polyphonic narrative with a focus on chronology and an examination of various conversational styles, both ancient and contemporary. The chapter also

elaborates on the use of humorous nicknames, sarcasm, dark humour, and sardonic descriptions in the select novels.

The chapter delves into the worldbuilding within the select novels, particularly through the historication of myths, highlighting the representation and re-imagination of myths by showcasing the use of Historiographic Metafiction to immerse readers in the landscapes, cultural details, and allusions of a specific time and place. It provides a detailed account of the fictional history and geography of the select novels, drawing parallels between the narrative world and the functioning of the real world. The select novels seamlessly blend fantasy and reality, making use of intertextual references that enrich the narrative. The gods, monsters, and other mythological beings are humanised and modernised through relatable descriptions, and they are presented in a jocular manner. In addition, it explores postmodern concepts such as technoculture and hyperreality, showing the incorporation of popular culture elements like games, fast food chains, pop music, marketing campaigns, merchandise, and psychedelic art into the select novels, exemplifying the aesthetics of contemporary children's fantasy literature. The analysis unveils the narrative techniques and worldbuilding within the select novels.

The central focus of the fourth chapter titled “**Crossing the Limbo: Bridging Fantasy, Reality, and Readers of All Age Groups**” is to highlight that fantasies within children's fantasy literature are stories with profound impact on readers as it reflects the sociological dynamics of contemporary times. The chapter delves into the discrimination faced by children's fantasy literature, often being associated with imagination and escapism, which relegates it to the status of low-quality, low-culture, or low-brow popular fiction, distinguishing it from high-culture

literature. The criticism of children's fantasy literature as low-brow contributes to the misconception that it is not worth reading by adults, resulting in a limbo.

The chapter discusses the significance of the select novels and the realistic themes it addresses which include bullying, psychological insecurities related to body image, self-perception, jealousy, egotism, impulsiveness, and teenage angst. It also explores neurodiversity and the academic challenges associated with it, as well as the perception of disability. Emotional themes like loneliness, challenges, distractions, actions, repercussions, strong female characterisations, themes of friendship, family, and romantic relationships are highlighted. Ecological concerns such as global warming, environmental destruction, pollution, and overpopulation are also explored. Dark themes like death and the loss of loved ones, along with issues related to hierarchy and marginalisation are discussed. The chapter emphasises the need to find strength and resilience when confronted with adversity and encourages readers to carve their way to triumph instead of relying on fate or destiny. The chapter brings the significance of children's fantasy literature and its impact on readers to the forefront. It also addresses the discrimination and misconceptions that surround the genre. It underscores the value of imparting valuable life lessons through literature and the importance of fostering reading habit in children, ultimately, bridging the gap between fantasy and reality.

The chapter highlights unique methods of Rick Riordan in constructing a distinct literary universe that imparts cultural, psychological, and sociological benefits to readers, underscoring the significance of interdisciplinary studies in children's fantasy literature. The chapter delves into practical strategies that can facilitate the translation of the realistic themes discussed in the select novels into real-life lessons. The strategies encompass the guidance provided by adults, including

parents, teachers, librarians, and writers with an emphasis on understanding the cognitive and emotional capacities of children to effectively convey the lessons across to them. The chapter underscores the evolving landscape of storytelling, transcending traditional physical books, and embracing multimedia formats such as e-books, audio books, movie adaptations, and immersive video games.

The fifth and final chapter titled “**Conclusion**” serves as a summation of the observations made throughout the study, tying them to the objectives of the study. The chapter reiterates the necessity of narratives in children’s fantasy literature like the select novels and encapsulates the essential themes and strategies discussed throughout the study, underlining the enduring significance of children’s fantasy literature and its influence on both young and adult readers. It also enlists the impact, limitations, and scope of the thesis, asserting that the creation of the modern mythopoeia (a new myth) in the select novels bridges the gap between fantasy and reality within the narrative and also in the lives of its readers.