Meeting Gods: The re-presentation and inclusion of figures of myth in early twenty-first century young adult and middle grade children’s novels

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University.

By

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Abstract

The creatures and gods of ancient and traditional myth have been included in young adult and middle grade children’s literature for as long as those literary designations have existed. Often allusions and metaphors draw a reader’s attention to think of a Greek god, a Norse myth or a monster from Homer’s *Odyssey*. Within the last several years, particularly between 2005 and 2010, a significant number of young adult and middle grade children’s novels have presented the gods and creatures of various cultures’ traditional myths in modern realistic settings, raising the question of how myth and its characters are presented in these novels. These mythic figures interact with young protagonists and exist within a reality that is familiar to the reader, taking on ideological present-day meanings. This study is a description of the analysis of the resulting ways and positions characters of traditional or new myth and mythic tensions are presented within this publishing trend.

Content analysis of the shared motifs and themes within a sample of 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels, the inclusions and re-presentations of these mythic figures extends the realms within which myth is traditionally understood. Myth is expanded in terms of these novels’ use of time and place and its categorizations as fantasy or reality. The realms of myth are also broadened by the ideological implications the novels are steeped in; whether they include messages about nationalism,
environmental conservation, the privileging of the myths of one culture or the interaction among myths of multiple cultures. The realm of myth is also extended in terms of the varied relationships explored among the mythic figures and human characters and whether the gods are positioned as absentee parents to the young protagonists, as friends or as antagonists. Although few young adult and middle grade novels within my sample depict the mythic figures of popular contemporary religions, the inclusion of angels in young adult paranormal romance novels does explore the myth and tensions of heterosexual romantic love.

Myth and children’s novels are weighted in ideology that offer paradigms and interpretations of how the reader may choose to perceive the world. Young readers’ discussions and contemplations of the themes and motifs within early twenty-first century young adult and middle grade novels that include characters of traditional or new myth in modern settings may encourage examinations of the expanded realms of myth; to see the way that understandings of time, reality, nationalism, other cultures, etc. shape perceptions of the world and of what myth is. Whether within the realm of belief, fantasy, science or reality, myth thrives; with new myths being created and traditional ones being acquired and given new weight and meaning, helping readers to make sense of their worlds, their experiences and their potential positions in society.
Dedication

For my parents who listened to my rambles,

for Rick Riordan who gave me something to ramble about,

and for Dr. Amy Shuman who rambled back.

“For someone had written in the margin, in tiny block letters:  DIDN’T YOU EVER WONDER, IRIS, WHAT HAPPENS TO GODS WHEN PEOPLE STOP WORSHIPPING THEM? WHERE DO THEY GO? WHAT DO THEY DO?”

~Sarah Deming, Iris, Messenger, 2007, p. 13

“The point is, each god is different. But all [of them] are free now, all finding places in this modern world of yours.”

~Rick Riordan, The Red Pyramid, 2010a, p. 251

“You carry your own mythologies with you, so you can see the stories that are important to you, the ones that parts of you believe.”

~Karen Healey, Guardian of the Dead, 2010, p. 192
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I would also like to thank the Martha King Scholarship Award Committee for selecting me as one of its award recipients.
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implied reader and implied author and reality to the metafictive Alcatraz Smedry

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Teaching & Learning
Specialization: Folklore
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I pictured it perfectly: His bearded face set in a serious expression. His hair slightly curled and wind-blown, as though he had just thrown a lightning bolt. His eyes would be blank and staring, since that was the style I had seen in textbook photos of busts of the Greek gods.

I knew exactly who I wanted to sculpt for my fifth-grade art project.

I went to my old playroom in the basement to find the pack of clay that Santa Claus had brought me a couple of Christmases ago.

Bringing the image in my mind to life in the clay was much more difficult than I had expected. My knowledge of sculpture had never evolved beyond my preschool skills of rolling blue and red play-dough worms and then eating the salty bits that stuck to my fingers.

At least I had developed the sense not to try and eat the clay.

I attempted to make his head first. I would not have enough clay for the pedestal-worthy bust I had envisioned so I would try to make a small, but complete figurine. I formed a small sphere that I tried to smush with my fingers to look more like a head. The result resembled a cone.

I decided to focus on making the beard, one of his distinguishing features. I imagined the detailed curly whiskers, like I had seen in a picture in Bernard Evslin’s *The*
Greek Gods (1966). But my fingers could only manage a small curved worm of clay that looked like a crescent moon. When I pressed the clay beard to what was supposed to be the head, the result resembled eroded rocks.

Frustration began to set in and I resorted to making the body, hoping it would help the figure to look humanoid. I rolled worms of clay to make up the arms and legs of my art project. I imagined his torso would be toned, radiating strength. Not knowing how to make grey clay worms radiate anything, I rolled yet another thick clay worm. Using a toothpick, I tried to etch muscles into his chest. The result looked more like a grid, a tick-tack-toe board.

The figure I constructed barely looked like a creature, let alone like a male Greek god. I resorted to making a label to be obvious. I wrote “Zeus,” on a sheet of lined notebook paper.

My attempt to recreate the Greek deity, to bring him into my own world with my own artistically-disinclined hands was a failure. This worm-man-thing did not appear strong or powerful, did not look as though he could send bolts of lightning down upon the fifth-grade boy who had borrowed my pencil but had never returned it.

The left arm fell off before I got the figurine to school the next morning, not-so-safely transported in a shoe box filled with Kleenex.

This is what I recalled of my fifth grade attempt to bring a god of myth into my life in a tangible way. Other people’s approaches that I would encounter years later—authors writing for children and young adults—would be more successful in bringing ancient gods to life in the modern world.
Introduction: Meet the gods

“Gods and men, united like in olden times. It’s the only way the world won’t be destroyed.”

~Carter
Rick Riordan, The Red Pyramid, 2010a, p. 514

“What if the Greek gods were alive and well and living in her town?”

~Iris musing to herself
Sarah Deming, 2007, p. 13

As a child, I loved myths, particularly those of Ancient Greece. I hated that the gods were always presented as belonging to a remote past. I wanted to talk with Zeus and Poseidon in my own world. I wanted Athena to watch over me, to realize I was special. Despite my inability to sense the Greek gods’ presence, some children’s textbooks would argue, the gods’ influence was still around me, if I looked for it, in architecture and advertising logos, in comics and video games, and, of course, in children’s novels.

Now, as an adult who has refused to let go of my love of children’s literature, I have devoted my life to reading, discussing and analyzing young adult and middle grade children’s novels. I could also never let go of that childhood love of myth. Instead of reading retellings of Classical myths, or what I prefer to refer to as traditional myths, I became fascinated with books that acquired the conflicts, the gods, monsters and other
characters of myth and brought them forward through time to appear in realistic, early twenty-first century settings. I wished such children’s novels had been as readily available when I was a child. But more than that wish, I was left wondering what purposes these novels served and how they portrayed myth and its characters and what types of meaning they take up when compared to more traditional understandings of myth.

In this chapter, I explore the history of including such characters and tensions in children’s novels, describe my selection process for the sample of 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels, frame my motif and thematic methodological approach to content analysis and outline the content of the other chapters of this study.

The Emergence of a Present-Day Literary Trend

Since 2005, such novels as the Percy Jackson series (Riordan, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), the Kane Chronicles (Riordan, 2010a), Guardian of the Dead (Healey, 2010), the Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy (Wood, 2007 2008, 2009) among others, incorporate gods and creatures from various cultures’ myths into present-day settings. This publishing trend seems to be on the rise, since over half of the young adult and middle grade novels in my sample included the characters of traditional myth in present-day settings were published in 2009 or 2010 with more published outside this frame in 2011.

Although traditional myths have a very long history of being adapted to include aspects or conflicts of the culture and time of the speaker or writer who is adapting them,
as is the case of the poets Ovid in his *Metamorphosis* (2004) or Homer in *The Iliad* (1950) (Brown, 2005), I wanted to search for the modern-day roots of bringing the gods and characters of ancient myth forward into the twenty-first century realistic settings in young adult and middle grade children’s novels. Using children’s novels that both acknowledge the traditional positions of these characters and give them new places and significance in the modern world, I wanted to determine the way myth was being defined, positioned and used to help young readers understand it and the world. More children’s novels are accessing and using myth establishing this publishing trend, but I was left with the uncertainty of what purpose myth was serving in the present-day narratives. This study is the investigation of this question.

When I write of *children’s literature*, I mean a broad interpretation that encompasses novels and texts for early, middle grade and young adult readers. The focus of my study is solely upon a small sample of young adult and middle grade novels within children’s literature. Specifically, I am focused upon fictional chapter books, novels or published, fictional narratives intended for middle elementary-aged or teen readers.

Some of the precursors for this growing trend were published before the scope of my sample; which is 2005 to 2010. Diana Wynn Jones’s *Eight Days of Luke* (1975), which is the oldest children’s novel I could find within this trend, features Norse mythic characters in a modern world and references those characters’ positions in traditional myth. In this middle grade novel, David Allard visits his relatives while on a break from boarding school. They are unhappy to be responsible for David ever since his parents died and David does not like them very much in return. He happens to say a combination of powerful words that cause a boy named Luke to appear outside his family’s home in
Ashbury, England. Luke claims that David has released him from his underground prison (p. 37).

While David thinks his new friend is an unusual boy, the narration shows that Luke is actually the Norse god Loki, who is the son of a giant and is associated with causing trouble for those he encounters (Hamilton, 1969, p. 457). In Jones’s *Eight Days of Luke*, Luke/Loki is hiding and is hunted by the other gods who want to return him to his prison, where snakes would drip venom on his head for his supposed role in killing the Norse god, Baldur (or Balder in other novels that I examine later in this study). Baldur’s mother, the goddess Frigga, in life had made all living creatures promise not to harm him (Hamilton, 1969, pp 456-457). In traditional Norse myth, Loki is jealous that Baldur is beloved by all and seeks a way to kill him. Loki disguises himself to speak to Frigga and learns that she had failed to ask the mistletoe plant to not harm Baldur. Loki then uses the plant to trick Baldur’s brother, Hoder, who is blind, to throw the shrub as a part of a game. The mistletoe strikes Baldur, killing him (Hamilton, 1969, p. 457).

In *Eight Days of Luke* (1975), over the days following Luke/Loki’s escape from his eternal prison, he befriends David. Other Norse gods individually approach David to convince him to give them Luke/Loki so they can return him to his prison. Tew meets David on Tuesday, Woden on Wednesday, Thor on Thursday and Frey and Freya on Friday. David refuses them, protecting his new friend.

In the Afterword, Jones mentions the Norse gods “were once the gods of England and Germany too” (p. 223). When deciding the setting, Jones writes she was looking for a Valhalla or “Hall of the Slain” in England, noting, “The English for it [Valhalla] is Walsall. There is a Walsall in England—an industrial suburb of Birmingham. It has so
little in common with Valhalla that I invented Wallsey Island instead,” a mythic place.

Mr. Wedding, or Woden (or Odin in other novels), takes David to. In writing this

children’s novel, Jones returns the Norse gods to England. Loki, always a troublemaker

and trickster figure, is a relatable and child-like friend to David. As David takes

responsibility for Luke/Loki and works to vindicate him from the crime of Baldrur’s
dead. David learns about his own family and the reason why his relatives have

mistreated him and kept him at boarding schools: he is the true inheritor of his parents’

fortune that his relatives have usurped. Justice and a return to a rightful order are what

both Luke/Loki and David find through their friendship. One resolution is on a mythic

scale, the other on a personal human level.


of a man named Shadow who is released from prison after his wife’s death in a car

accident. He encounters Norse, Greek, Slavic, Irish, Indian, Native American, Egyptian,

other African gods, etc. who have immigrated to the United States of America over the

centuries, brought there by the people who believed in them and told their stories in the

new land. The fact that so many gods from traditional myths and from so many different

cultures are included in the present-day United States makes this adult novel’s

examination of myth, belief and American culture noteworthy. None of the middle grade

and young adult novels within my sample that attempt to mingle gods from different

mythic systems accommodates as many systems of belief as Gaiman’s novel does.

In American Gods, 32-year-old Shadow learns that the ancient gods are preparing

to battle with new, younger American gods. Mr. Wednesday, or the Norse god Odin,

who like other ancient gods has been left “scared and dispossessed, [with] only what little
smidgens of worship or belief we could find” (p. 137) after his true-believers died, describes the new, rising, American gods:

“…There are new gods growing in America, clinging to growing knots of belief: gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone, of radio and hospital and television, gods of plastic and of beeper and of neon. Proud gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance.” (pp. 137-138)

The ancient gods plan to battle these new gods, demonstrating cultural tensions between the ancient and modern, tradition and innovation, and exploring what it is to be “American.”

While not directly influenced by Jones’s *Eight Days of Luke*, Gaiman has noted that his original inspiration for *American Gods* was in the same vain as Jones’s middle grade children’s novel. While answering readers’ questions on his blog, Gaiman has noted:

A few people want to know whether American Gods was inspired by Diana Wynne Jones’s novel “8 Days of Luke”. Not exactly, although they bear an odd relationship, like second cousins once removed or something. About six or seven years ago, I had an idea for a structure for a story, all about the gods and the days of the week. I chewed it and played with it and was terribly happy with it[.] And then the penny dropped, and I realised, gloomily, that I’d managed, working back from first principles, to come up with a wonderful structure for a story -- but one that Diana had already used, in her brilliant “8 Days of Luke.” So I put it down as one of those places where our heads went to the same sort of place… and, with
regret, I abandoned it. Or almost. I kept Mr. Wednesday, and the day of his meeting, in the back of my head, and when I came to put American Gods together, he was there, ready and waiting. (Gaiman, 2011, para. 3)

The fact that Gaiman altered his plan for writing American Gods demonstrates how Gaiman’s adult novel and his approach to including the Norse gods in the modern world is in conversation with Jones’s approach.

In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the young adult series His Dark Materials (1995, 1997, 2000), another precursor to this literary trend, was published. Following the example of John Milton’s Paradise Lost (2005), the series includes angels and the Christian God as characters, as well as criticisms of the Church and religion. Philip Pullman’s trilogy has been summarized as:

…In part a reworking of Milton's Paradise Lost with two children, Lyra and Will, taking on the quest to save the world and fighting the war in heaven. Only this time, the fates are reversed. Lyra and Will overturn the established order. Their worlds are redeemed, and God, who turns out to be only a wizened old man encased in a life-support machine, crumbles to dust [Pullman, 2000, pp. 409-411]. (Mitchison, 2003, emphasis added)

Pullman has noted that when he wrote His Dark Materials series, “I was beginning to tell the same story [of Paradise Lost], too. I wasn’t worried about that, because I was well aware that there are many ways of telling the same story” (Pullman, 2005, p. 9). In this way, Pullman was retelling Paradise Lost, a story that “could take a great deal of retelling,” (p. 9) in both a modern realistic setting of Oxford, England and in other fantastic settings.
Although His Dark Materials trilogy is only partially set in a world that may be recognizable to the reader, the trilogy’s exploration and critique of the relationship between the Christian God and humanity has drawn a lot of attention. The fact that God—or the Authority as He is referred to throughout most of the series—is rebelled against and presented as weak and perishable (Pullman, 2000, pp. 410-411) has caused the series to face censorship attempts in the United States. In 2008, for example, 74 of the 513 challenges made against the series were successful (Pilkington, 2009). It seems when belief is a matter of issue within novels that incorporate characters from traditional myths or when a predominant worldview, such as religious belief in the Christian God, is challenged, such stories reflect the tensions of their eras and cultures and may spark controversy.

The statement of the problem and the purpose of this study.

There has always been a trickling stream of authors and readers exploring the nature of myth, religion, deities and their relationships to cultures and people within literature. In recent years, there had been a deluge of incorporating gods into young adult and middle grade children’s novels. Not only do many of these novels include characters from traditional myth and their significance historically, they ascribe them with new positions and present-day meanings and influence the way the reader may regard myth. My purpose is to draw attention to this trend and to contemplate and analyze the significance, meanings or positions myth and its figures are given within a sample of 40 middle grade and young adult novels that incorporate aspects of traditional myth in
present-day realistic settings.

No other scholars have analyzed this literary trend and the way it portrays modern cultures and the gods’ positions in the realities presented. A few studies have been conducted within the last few decades on the use of myth within literature; including one by C.W. Sullivan III (1989), which examined the ways Celtic myths have been incorporated into children’s literature, and another by Eric J. Ziolkowski (1996), which analyzed the way myth is addressed and presented in adult literature. No other studies have explored such a large and recent sample nor have they addressed the ways myths and their characters from various cultures are shown to interact in present-day realistic settings.

The Sample of Children’s Novels and the Questions Addressed in This Study

In the children’s novels and series published between 2005 and 2010 that form my sample of 40 young adult and middle grade novels (Table 1), characters who have qualities that readers may relate to who also interact with the gods or other characters of traditional myths in modern day realistic settings. Some of the relatable child characters are relatives to a god, some are heroes tasked with saving a country or the world. Other characters are advocates for the gods, carrying on a myth’s memory that might otherwise be lost. For example, in the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), the teenage protagonist Percy is the child of the Olympian god Poseidon and is tasked with multiple quests to maintain peace among the gods and to avert a war with the god Kronos and the other Titans; the gods the Olympians had defeated before
humanity existed on Earth (Hamilton, 1969, p. 21).
# Children’s Novels Comprising the Study’s Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Series/Novel Titles</th>
<th>Year Published</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adornetto, Alexandra</td>
<td>Halo series: <em>Halo</em></td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bray, Libba</td>
<td><em>Going Bovine</em></td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chadda, Sarwat</td>
<td>Devil’s Kiss series: <em>Devil’s Kiss, Dark Goddess</em></td>
<td>2009, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deming, Sarah</td>
<td><em>Iris, Messenger</em></td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friesner, Esther</td>
<td><em>Temping Fate</em></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healey, Karen</td>
<td><em>Guardian of the Dead</em></td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Need series: <em>Need, Captivate, Entice</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate, Lauren</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kane Chronicles: <em>The Red Pyramid</em></td>
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<td>Simner, Janni Lee</td>
<td><em>Thief Eyes</em></td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springer, Nancy</td>
<td><em>Dusssie</em></td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang, Gene Luen</td>
<td><em>American Born Chinese</em></td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 19 Authors            | 40 Young Adult and Middle Grade Children’s novels                                     | Published between 2005 and 2010 |

**Table 1: Children’s Novels Comprising the Study’s Sample**

In other instances, the protagonists are ordinary humans who may help the gods.
This is the case in *Temping Fate* (Friesner, 2006) which features Ilana Newhouse, a girl who, along with other high school and college-age temps, provides temporary assistance to the gods and takes on some of their powers and duties so the deities may take breaks from their work. In other cases the young adult and middle grade protagonists are plagued by the gods and creatures of myth, or they learn that they themselves have a place in a pantheon of gods. I will explore these varied relationships throughout this study. But no matter the specifics of the exchanges among the mortal and mythic characters, these novels and this study present myth beyond the designations of belonging to an ancient and fantastic past to which it is often relegated to in traditional retellings.

I focused upon young adult and middle grade novels that acknowledged both the traditional positions characters of myth have held and that recontextualized them within the present as well. This allowed me to examine the figures themselves for present-day significance and to look at the way their inclusion in the novels expanded the *realms of myth*, or the areas, aspects or dimensions typically included when describing myth as a genre or form of narrative (its setting, whether it is regarded as fantasy or as a reality, whether it is associated with a particular culture or country, etc.).

The realms I created and examined and that the middle grade and young adult children’s novels within my sample include (1) the ways time and place are presented, (2) whether the stories present themselves as fantasy or challenge understandings of reality, (3) the ideological implications of the stories that have present-day significance, (4) whether the gods or characters of myth from different cultures or systems of belief interact within a single children’s novel or series and (5) the types of relationships the middle grade and young adult protagonists have with the gods or other mythic figures.
included and re-presented from ancient tradition (Table 2). These lenses for my analysis emerged as I began my reading and were traceable aspects of both the traditional genre of myth and across the young adult and middle grade novels I analyzed for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Realms of Myth</th>
<th>Topic of Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) The realms of time and place</td>
<td>Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) The realms of fantasy and reality</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The realm of ideological implications and present-day significance</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) The realm in which the gods or characters of myth from different cultures interact</td>
<td>Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) The realm in which the middle grade and young adult protagonists have personal relationships with the mythic figures</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Realms of Myth Examined in This Study

All of the novels that comprise my sample explore at least four of these realms of myth within present-day settings, and many explored all five. I only required that they include four of the dimensions to be a part of my sample. I would have liked to require all five realms, but many of then novels avoided (4) including characters of myth from different cultures interacting.
The questions.

As I read my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, I asked, what is the realm and time of myth in each novel? Are the gods and mythic creatures solely those of one ancient culture, multiple cultures mingling or are other creatures, people or figures positioned as being gods? What are the mythic figures’ relevance in the novels and their relationships to the young protagonists? What are the implications for the meanings and realities and cultures presented within the children’s novels? I applied relevant questions about each realm of myth to each novel. Some of the sample questions are listed in Table 3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Realms of Myth</th>
<th>Example Questions I Asked as I Read and Analyzed Each Novel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time and Place</td>
<td>Does the narrative proceed chronologically? Do the characters of myth experience time as the human characters do? Is a mythic realm included? If so, how is it accessed and how are time and place presented as operating there? What familiar realistic settings are included? How are these locations described? Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy and Reality</td>
<td>Does the narrator assert that the story is truth? Does the protagonist know the characters of myth exist from the onset of the story? If he or she learns that myth exists in the modern world, how does he or she react? What worldviews are presented as “true” or “real”? As a reader, do I view this novel as realistic or as fantastic? Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological Implications</td>
<td>What are the underlying ideas that drive some of the scenes or the entire story? What are the lessons I can “take away” from the story as the reader? What are some underlying assumptions of the story or of the characters or of the descriptions? Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mingling Mythic Figures</td>
<td>What happens when characters from different cultures, religions or backgrounds meet in the story? Are any paradigms or worldviews privileged, dismissed as false or questioned? Are different worldviews in conflict? Do characters of myth interact? If so, how? Do the characters of myth come from different systems of belief? If so, does this influence their interactions? How so? What are the implications of these interactions? Etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protagonists Relationships with Characters of Myth</td>
<td>How does the child character interact with the characters of myth? How does he or she feel about the characters of myth and vice versa? How is the protagonist positioned in relation to the characters of myth? Are the protagonists presented as having powers or are they powerless in the presence of the characters of myth? If positioned as a hero or heroine, how does the child protagonist feel about this positioning? Etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Sample Questions Considered While Analyzing the Realms of Myth in Each Novel

For this study, I explored the way that the realms of myth are expanded within my sample of literature in terms of how myth is defined, the time and place it occupies within
the novels, the creatures and characters that are presented as being figures of myth, and the underlying ideas they share about individuals, relationships, culture and reality. I searched for patterns across the novels and for the possible significance these books could have for young readers in the diverse present-day world of multi-ethnic cultures, single-parent households, concerns over environmental conservation, tensions over maintaining tradition or adapting to new behaviors or rituals, etc.

I explore the meaning of the gods and creatures of myth from as many cultures as I could find that are included in young adult and children’s novels with early twenty-first century settings and that were published between 2005 and 2010. The cultures and beliefs included are Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Hawaiian, Judeo-Christian, Maori, Native American (specifically Cherokee and Munsee), Norse, Roman, Russian and famous people from American history mythic figures. Within my sample of 40 children’s novels, I analyze the way these figures from myth interact with the young protagonists. I examine the other figures that are propped-up as new gods in modern-day American culture to lend to my argument that myth is alive and well, both shaping and being shaped by the cultures and individuals who choose to listen, read, write and interpret it.

Myth exists in realms beyond the ancient past, beyond the time and place of origin. It exists in and beyond the fantastic, shaping realities and taking on present-day meanings to help people speak to their concerns about their identities, relationships, cultures, nations and worlds. It is not a concept removed from science, religion or belief, but rather encompasses them all. As long as people are willing to shape myth with their words, interpretations and beliefs, there is the possibility to make meaning with myth.
Martin M. Winkler, a Classics scholar, who often explores the ways myth and Ancient Roman culture are adapted for the cinema, has noted, “there is room for both scholarly exposition and creative adaptation of classical and all other literature,” (2007, p. 44) meaning, a scholar, such as myself, could examine these modern young adult and middle grade children’s novels as new myths and be inspired by traditional myths and their re-presentations, modernizations, retellings and evolutions. And so my work began.

**Methodology and My Approach to Content Analysis: Shaping chaos with chaos.**

When I began work in my doctoral program I already knew that I wanted my dissertation research to involve the way children’s novels incorporate myth. I considered examining the way the mythical hero’s journey—like the quests of Hercules—were presented in young adult and children’s fantasy series. I contemplated focusing on the way present-day retellings of myth (still set in the traditional, mythic time and place of the beginning of the world that would be unrecognizable to the reader) like the young adult novels *Cupid* by Julius Lester (2007) or *Quiver* by Stephanie Spinner (2002) took up modern meanings.

Then I read *The Lightning Thief* (2005), the first novel in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series. The novel shares the story of teenager Percy Jackson, who learns that he is the son of a Greek god and that he must go on quests to avert a war among the gods. If I studied simple retellings, I could not examine this novel, which was set in the present-day United States. I wanted to analyze the Percy Jackson series. I thought of it as a landmark children’s series that hastened the development of this current boom of
including gods in twenty-first century realistic settings.

The selection of my sample.

With my decision to use the Percy Jackson series, my study began to take shape. I looked for other children’s novels that incorporated figures of myth in a present-day world that would feel familiar to the reader. The process of gathering my sample of middle grade and young adult novels was not ideal. I happened by chance upon Tera Lynn Child’s Oh.My.Gods. duology (2008, 2009) when looking for a new young adult novel to read. My proactive library database, Google, and Amazon searches involved looking at “If you liked Percy Jackson, you may also like…” lists, scanning book descriptions and reviews for mentions of key words like “myth,” “retelling,” “lore,” “legend,” or the mention of a specific god’s name, etc., asking professors and other graduate students in my program if they had read novels with similar content to the Percy Jackson series or Oh.My.Gods.

I felt fortunate when the movie version of the first Percy Jackson novel, also titled *The Lightning Thief* (Hammel & Columbus, 2010), premiered in theaters and my local library sent out an email beforehand to children’s book recommendation subscribers (like myself) who wanted to read other books that incorporated mythology (Figure 1)
This listing led me to read *Iris, Messenger* (Deming, 2007), the Gods of Manhattan trilogy (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010), *The Night Tourist* duology (Marsh, 2007, 2009), and *Dusssie* (Springer, 2007). These middle grade and young adult novels would provide the
foundation for my expanding sample. A complete listing of all of the novels in my sample may be found in Appendix A, in Table 1 or in the charts of Appendix B at the end of this study.

I read the set of stand-alone novels and book series in no particular order, picking up the ones that seemed most interesting or relevant at the moment. Whenever I began a series, I read the books within it consecutively, assuming they had all been published at the time I began my reading of the series. I coded the books as I read, marking passages with notations or with sticky notes, writing in the margins or folding over pages. I made notes about the settings, the culture or the protagonist, the gods and other characters of myth—any mentions of their positions within traditional lore and the way they were represented in the modern-day settings and whether these presentations were consistent or not—the ways the protagonists learned of the mythic world, whether they question their sanity as they were informed of the mythic world, who told them of the mythic dimensions of the world, the protagonists’ relationships with the mythic characters, whether issues of faith, tradition or ritual were addressed, etc. I found it best to try to record the general tensions and content of the books or series (Appendix A) as I read and to organize how I would incorporate each text into my study while each novel’s content was fresh in my mind. (This meant I occasionally had to reread some of the novels within my sample).

To limit the scope and length of this study, I decided to focus on young adult and children’s novels published between 2005 and 2010 that met the criteria of including characters from traditional myth or, in a few cases, created from history in early twenty-first century, realistic settings who interacted with other human characters and
acknowledge their history or status within traditional myth or claimed status or positions as deities for the first time. I did read beyond my own restrictions to deepen my understanding of this literary trend and to contextualize the larger conversation of how figures from folklore was being incorporated into children’s novels set in the present-day. I read Diana Wynne Jones’s *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) to understand the history of this literature. I examined Guus Kuijer’s work of historical fiction, *The Book of Everything* (2006), which incorporates the prophet or Messiah Jesus as a character into the 1950s setting in the Netherlands, because it is one of the few children’s novels to include a god of a religion commonly practiced in modern cultures.

*The scope and limitations of the sample and study.*

The constructs of and the restrictions upon my sample are arbitrary. There are young adult and middle grade novels beyond the time frame and scope of my official sample that explore these same tensions, realms and characters in similar ways. In some cases the characters of myth were not always the focus of the novels or were not set in realistic setting (as was the case with *Runemarks* (Harris, 2008) or *Cupidity* (Goode, 2004)). As I undertook my research, controlling the size and scope of my sample would become one of the most difficult aspects of my study, especial since some of the individual novels within larger series did not adhere to my sample’s criteria while other novels in the same series did. (For example, there is no discussion or inclusion of myth or characters of myth in the first novel of Carrie Jones’s Need series (2009), but Norse mythology is central to the following two novels in the series (2010a, 2010b). In the case
of Kate Thompson’s New Policeman trilogy, the final novel is set in an undated
dystopian future (2010).)

Also influencing the books that comprised my sample, within 2009, 2010 and on,
young adult paranormal romance novels that include angels as characters within modern
settings became a popular publishing trend. Although I wanted to explore this trend and
include it in my overall official sample, I did not want such novels to comprise a majority
of my sample either, since my scope extends beyond just Islamic, Judeo-Christian
figures. So, the Hush, Hush series (2009, 2010) by Becca Fitzpatrick, the Fallen series
represent this larger trend in my sample because they address the angels’ history within
traditional myth in various ways.

I had to distinguish among young adult and middle grade novels that appropriate
ancient religious organizations within a modern setting as opposed to appropriating the
characters. For example, Sarwat Chadda’s Devil’s Kiss (2009) and its sequel Dark
Goddess (2010) re-present the Knights Templar, historically a clandestine Christian
society that may be summarized as:

[representing] the highest ideals of Christendom; they were the first military
Order, a brotherhood of fighting monks, knights dedicated to Christ and to the
three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Founded in Jerusalem in 1118 (or
perhaps 1119: the exact date is uncertain), they had sworn in God’s name to
defend the holy places and to protect pilgrims on their long journeys. (Howarth,
2007, p. 14)

In Chadda’s Devil’s Kiss series (2009, 2010), the first potential female member, fifteen-
year-old Billi is tested to join the Knights Templar as she battles ghuls, fallen angels, werewolves, a goddess and other creatures of myth and legend. The Devil’s Kiss series distinguishes between ritual practices of religion and faith in the Islamic Judeo-Christian God. Also, the angel Michael, who had been pretending to be a teenage boy interested in Billi, reveals his true identity as a mythic figure and described himself to Billi as “the Angel of Death” (2009, p. 143). He states:

> It was I who rained fire on Gomorrah. It was I who stalked the streets of Egypt and slew the firstborn. I cast down Satan. I and I alone.” He stared at her with a mixture of pride and anger. “I will bring people back to the light. I am God’s killer, and I will not be judged by the children of clay.” (pp. 143-144)

After realizing that the story situated the angel Michael both within his historical context and within a modern-day one (which will be explored further in Chapter One), I decided to include the Devil’s Kiss series within my official sample, but I decided that the inclusion of a surviving religious organization alone would not be reason enough to be included in my study.

I also read P.B. Kerr’s Children of the Lamp series (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), even though it began beyond the scope of my sample, to see the ways djinn legends are being re-presented. Leaning upon characters from ancient history, the tales within *The Thousand and One Nights* (Burton, 2004) or *Arabian Nights*—a collection of stories based in ancient Indian, Persian and Arab cultures that were recorded within the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Zipes, 2007, p. 54)—and other works of literature, the series shares the story of New York City, twelve-year-old, twins, Philippa and John Gaunt. The twins learn that their mother is a djinn and that they have power over luck
and the ability to grant wishes. They go on adventures with their Uncle Nimrod, who is also a djinn, to learn about their powers and to maintain the homeostasis between good and bad luck. In the first novel of this middle grade series, *The Akhenaten Adventure* (2004), the djinn are re-imagined as a species that guards “all the luck in the universe” (p. 103) and who operate using the laws of physics, affecting “the protons in the molecules possessed by objects” (p. 163) to make objects appear or disappear. The series, while acknowledging the existence of angels, djinn and some other creatures and places from ancient history, from folklore and even the Old Testament—such as the Tower of Babble in the second book, *The Blue Djinn of Babylon* (2006)—attempts to focus on a scientific explanation for djinn powers, seeming to dismiss religion. (But it is worth noting, in the third novel, *The Cobra King of Kathmandu* (2007), the twins meet an angel, Afriel, who creates “marvels” and “miracles” to astonish people, because “there’s too much self-belief around these days. Self-belief, and the belief that science has all the answers” (p. 81).) Uncle Nimrod notes about the djinns’ role in accidentally contributing to religious belief, that, “Many of the world’s superstitions and religions have been caused by careless or mischievous djinn speaking to mundanes [or normal humans] while being out-of-body” (p. 242).

Kerr’s Children of the Lamp series is not included as a part of my official sample because, while it draws upon traditional lore, shows manipulation of time and space in the way the djinns inhabit lamps or bottles, incorporates critiques of present-day society, explores religion, science and magic and even incorporates characters from the Old Testament as minor characters. Although the series tries to address the characters of myth co-existence, the inclusion of these characters and their relationships to the twins is
not the focus of the stories. Only a few characters from traditional myth are incorporated and those that are do not take on strong modern significance or do not have enough of a featured role within the series. Rather the series focuses on present-day people exploring the tensions and places associated with traditional tales of djinn and many other tensions and settings that are completely modern.

While the majority of the characters from traditional myth examined are positioned as gods, in a few cases, I did examine novels that featured other mythic creatures, heroes or other notable humans—like the Medusa of Greek myth—since the incorporation of such figures often focused on giving these creatures modern significance; such as a feminist interpretation of a Medusa in Nancy Springer’s *Dusssie* (2007).

When it came to exploring children’s novels that presented “new myths” not based on traditional myth, but that rather position deceased, famous, real people or invented beings as gods, I restricted myself to examining the novels that incorporated historical people as gods, as is the case of Scott Mebus’s Gods of Manhattan series (2008, 2009, 2010). I wanted to maintain the examination of the history of the mythic figures and the way they or tradition are being acquired to take on meanings relevant to the experience of living in the early twenty-first century.

I had particular difficulty deciding whether or not the Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) by Michael Scott should be included in my sample. Although the young adult series incorporates the gods and creatures from many different cultures’ traditional myths in the modern world, instead of presenting the gods as being gods, they are instead the “Elder Race” (2007, p. 81), a species of powerful
creatures that once ruled Earth and some of whom want to reclaim the world. The series creates a universal origin for all of the characters of myth, instead of maintaining their status as gods. The gods are reduced to a species that has “access to a science that [is] so advanced, we would call it magic” (2007, p. 277).

Although I read the series and draw quotations as examples of some of the ways the novels within this publishing trend play with the figures of traditional myth and history, I decided not to include the series in my official sample. An underlying assumption in all my readings is that the gods of traditional myth are still presented as gods in these present-day re-presentations, that I can look at the ways their status as gods is explored within the realistic modern-day settings within these young adult and middle grade children’s novels. I did not want to examine the way the gods’ status was explained away, reducing them to a scientifically advanced species.

Novels and series like the ones noted here may not be officially a part of my sample, but they are still in conversation with myth and its re-presentations in modern society. I do draw examples from many such novels that are not a part of my official sample because they provide points of contrast to my primary or official sample of young adult and middle grade novels and because they demonstrate the implication that the themes, motifs and contemplations about myth are generalizable and are present in some children’s novels beyond the scope of my sample.

Content analysis.

As a researcher, my approach was to perform deep analyses of the young adult
and middle grade novels’ content, usually focusing on the plots, characterizations and ways characters are described or interact with one another. According to Klaus Krippendorff, one of the few researchers to write extensively about conducting content analysis research, the process is “a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not [necessarily] from an author’s or user’s perspective (2004, p. 3). Through close readings of my sample of children’s novels I examined the ways figures of myth are used and how that influenced my understanding of what myth is as a reader and how that could, in turn, influence the way I understand the world and myth’s place in it. My reactions are my own, meaning other scholars with different experiences and different knowledge about myth may pick up these novels within different contexts or with different lenses of analysis and may interpret these novels differently.

Krippendorff elaborates upon the definition of content analysis to be “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). I could speak more easily to this descriptive study being valid than replicable. As I was doing my research, I often felt as though I was shaping chaos with chaos.

Motifs.

My approach was to first look for common motifs among the novels I studied. Since the second-half of the nineteenth century, this has been a common approach to study myth and other folklore genres. A motif, according to folklore scholar Dan Ben-Amos is a “vague and varied concept,” (2004, p. 17), but he distinguishes two main
interpretations based on the historical variation of the term’s use:

On the one hand [motif] is the fundamental theme of a story, the primary moving force within a distinct plot; but on the other hand it is the most elemental narrative particle that has the power to move from one story to another. Motif is ‘the smallest element of narrative that has the capacity (strength) to exist in transmission…’ (pp. 27-28)

Ben Amos draws from the work of Max Lüthi (1962, 1982) in the latter portion of the quotation. I examined the novels within my sample for shared motifs. This helped guide me to the points to compare among the novels in my study. For example, one common motif or “minimal narrative unit” (Ben-Amos, 2004, p. 17) in this publishing trend of re-presenting myth and including traditional characters in realistic twenty-first century settings is the moment when a character, usually a creature from a traditional myth, a family member or a teacher, explains to the child or young adult protagonist that the creatures and gods of myth exist. By taking this moment and examining the characters’ dialogues and explanations for why and how the beings of myth have survived into a present-day world similar to the reader’s own, I am able to extrapolate the positions and realms myth has within the narratives and for me as the reader. (I explore this specific motif further in Chapter Six.)

Traditionally, motifs have been recorded, listed and catalogued in thick volumes of indexes, which may be daunting to examine. I have found using motifs in this concrete way in my research to be very beneficial. For me, a motif is a point of meaning to question and ponder. I may begin by asking, “What purpose does this motif serve in this story?” and trying to answer that question by going beyond an individual text to see
how the same motif is used in other novels. Motifs are an avenue for a reader to begin to understand the meanings of confusing or noteworthy moments of a story and to make comparisons among texts. Pondering these moments is how I chose to approach much of this study and could also be a beginning point to draw comparisons among the novels when they are used in classrooms.

Themes.

I also examined the novels in my study for their common themes. In Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature (Kiefer, 2010), a common textbook used with teachers and education students, a novel’s theme is defined as “the larger meanings that lie beneath the story’s surface” (p. 17). These meanings go “beyond the action of the plot” (p. 17). Theme may also be thought of as the “central idea or ideas explored in a literary work” (Moon, 1999, p. 166). By searching the novels for their themes, I have extracted some of the meanings of myth and of its characters in early twenty-first century children’s literature. I have analyzed for how the gods of myth included in a present-day society take on environmental, social or cultural significance. I have also examined the books for the way gender, race nationality and the setting are presented.

After noting relevant motifs and themes, I also explored the realms of myth and the way human characters interact with characters of myth and analyzed the way the children’s novels challenge or support commonly used definitions of myth. The resulting study is in your hands.

Since much of my work was interpretive, some scholars may disagree with my
findings or may note other motifs, themes, assumptions, etc. that are present in these novels. Another limitation of this study is that I cannot make assertions about the young adult and children’s novels beyond the scope of this study. I have no way of predicting the future course of this publishing trend. I can only speak to likely avenues it may take and to discussions and issues it may explore.
### Table 4: Categories of Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Analysis</th>
<th>Details of Each Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motifs</td>
<td>Smallest units of meaning that may be compared. Includes characterizations of mythic figures, actions and reoccurring discussions about the relevance of myth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Larger meanings underlying stories that may be compared for their early twenty-first century significance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realms of Myth</td>
<td>The exploration of the ways (1) time and place, (2) fantasy and reality, (3) ideological implications and present-day significance of the inclusion and re-presentations of mythic figures and causes, (4) mingling among different mythic figures and systems of belief and the present-day meanings are included in these re-presentations of mythic figures and inclusions of mythic tensions and (5) the middle grade and young adult protagonists interact with the included represented mythic figures. These realms are often revealed within my examinations of the motifs and themes as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### A Prophecy of What Is to Come in This Study

This book is organized by subject and by the realms of myth I examined within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. First, I explore the ways myth is often defined among scholars and within a few American literature textbooks for
children. I then examine the ways myth has been categorized in literature in past studies and I use my own categories to specifically identify the expanded realms that the children’s novels in my sample attribute to myth: The way myth and its gods and creatures are presented in time and place, as myth is ascribed to both the realms of fantasy and reality, as having modern ideological, multicultural significance and implications about the protagonists’ relationships with the characters of myth. Some of the young adult and middle grade novels I have studied, while being the focus of one chapter, are also referenced, discussed or analyzed in other chapters. To avoid having to repeatedly summarize the plot of each stand-alone novel or series within my sample, a brief description of each of the books or series is included in Appendix A.

In the first chapter I address the multiple, often-competing definitions of what traditional myth is historically and specifically its purpose within society according to the philosopher Plato. I also examine what myth is among various schools of thought including, folklore, education and advertising. I explore what traditional myth is in contrast to other folklore genres, including legend and fairy tale.

Chapter Two examines the way myth is incorporated—whether whole myths are retold, fractions of a myth or whether a god’s characterization is alluded to—pulling examples from the realistic young adult novel Troy High (Norris, 2010) and the young adult novel in verse Psyche in a Dress (Block, 2006). I describe the ways myth has been categorized in recent adult and children’s literature, examining previous categories constructed by scholars such as C.W. Sullivan III (1989) and Eric J. Ziolkowski (1996). I also outline my own approach to categorization and terminology, preferring the terms mythic figures to describe the characters of myth, inclusion and re-presentation to assert
the ways those characters are incorporated into a present-day setting and how both they and the nature of myth are altered to have modern significance, respectively.

In Chapter Three, I present the specific ways that the young adult and middle grade novels in this study challenge the traditional folkloric understandings of the setting of traditional origin myths, which occurs within a place and time of origin, unfamiliar to present-day people. All of the young adult and children’s novels in my sample challenge this by including characters of those traditional myths in early twenty-first century time and in realistic places that may be recognizable to the modern reader, expanding the realm of myth’s setting. I identify the way various novels in my sample demonstrate different understanding of time, including primordial, reversible or cyclical concepts of mythical time.

Although all novels within my sample are predominantly set in present-day realistic settings, they often present fantastic mythical places as threatening. Whether fantastic in scope or not, readers may draw upon the mythological significance of seemingly ordinary places and understand familiar landmarks in new ways.

Chapter Four examines the complicated ways young adult and middle grade children’s novels that incorporate characters of myth tend to be classified either as fantasy or as presenting alternate ways to understand reality. While myth is often considered the root of fantasy, it does not always need to be categorized as such. But when it is classified as fantasy, myth is more likely to avoid being challenged by would-be book banners. Also, when considered fantasy, the novels within my sample often have characters explain an origin for their magic that does not involve people’s faith in the gods of myth.
Whether fantasy or contemporary realistic fiction, almost no middle grade or young adult novels that I could find included figures from contemporary religious faiths, with the exception of the young adult paranormal romance trend that presents angels as love interests to teenage characters. But instead of addressing issues of faith, one example, *Hush, Hush* (2009) by Becca Fitzpatrick, includes challenges to the protagonists’ sense of reality instead of an exploration of faith. Libba Bray’s *Going Bovine* (2009) also questions the nature of reality, presenting the idea that reality is something a protagonist chooses to believe and that, in at least one case, the reader may face similar choices.

The fifth chapter shares how ideas, views or ideological stances permeate the content of the young adult and children’s novels and often have cultural or nationalistic implications. After establishing a definition of what ideology is and the way it has historically influenced folklore research, I examine how it is incorporated into my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. I study the ways the traditional mythic characters Medusa and Medea are given varying present-day meanings within the Percy Jackson (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009) and Heroes of Olympus (2010) series by Rick Riordan and within the novels *Medusa Jones* (Collins, 2008) and *Dusscie* (Springer, 2007). I analyze the environmental implications incorporated within the Percy Jackson series that call for individuals to do their part in reducing pollution and restoring “the wild.” Also, drawing upon the works of the Grimm brothers as predecessors, I survey the way authors like Rick Riordan, Katherine Marsh and Scott Mebus attempt to represent what it is to live in America and within New York City and consider the way they may contribute to new or future myths.
The sixth chapter expands upon ways these novels are ideologically driven to focus on how some cultures’ mythic systems are privileged; specifically within the multiple series by author Rick Riordan. The way the Greek gods are re-presented in the Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009) is more benevolent when compared to the way the Egyptian gods are presented in the Kane Chronicles (2010a). Riordan does begin to draw parallels among different systems of belief in *The Lost Hero* (2010b), the first novel in his third series, Heroes of Olympus. Within this novel, a character named Piper McLean notes similarities among Cherokee beliefs, Greek myths and Roman myths.

Scott Mebus, in a very different approach, explores the tension between European-born New York gods and the Munsee Native American spirits in the Gods of Manhattan trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010) and how their conflicts center upon land use and power in the mythic realm of Manhattan Island. The gods and spirits’ struggle to unite and trust one another parallels the United States’ own history.

Karen Healey’s *Guardian of the Dead* (2010) takes these initial minglings among the gods of different cultures further by showing how the stories and myths a character believes in may shape her world. This literary trend is pushing toward including several different systems of belief to present a realistic experience of how various cultures interact and influence one another within the narration and worldviews of young adult protagonists.

Chapter Seven explores the personal relationships among the gods and young protagonists within several of the novels in my sample. When the protagonists are related to or are descendants of the gods, they often gain a sense of empowerment
through their relationship. Characters with no familial connection to a god, fare less well in the presence of the gods or mythical creatures. No matter their background, the child protagonists make choices and take on responsibilities that influence their world, help them understand their positions in it and understand themselves.

The eighth chapter focuses the implications of my research and the ways both traditional myth, included mythic figures and the themes and tensions of re-presented or new myths may be explored with young readers and in classrooms. These implications include how myth allows readers to play with identities, to learn of the traditional myths and creatures commonly referenced and alluded to in architecture and art, to think intertextually using motifs and themes and to be aware of possible multiple interpretations of the novels. I also list and describe some other motifs and themes common among many of the novels within my sample that an individual reader or a teacher and class could consider or discuss more closely, but that were not central to my arguments within this study. These motifs and themes include overcoming death or loss, being aware of the importance of dreams or having an appreciation of myth, among others. Some of these motifs and themes are mentioned or are only explored minimally within the body of this study, but are worth noting or could be incorporated into classroom discussions.

To conclude, I look to the future of myth, considering some potential new myths that are present in literature and I offer even more ways that myth may be understood in literature and the way that it helps readers understand life and literature.

I have also included two appendices: Appendix A is a brief guide to the plots and conflicts of the young adult and middle grade children’s novels published between 2005
and 2010 that are privileged as the official sample of my study. All of these books are referenced multiple times and in multiple chapters of this study. While other works of literature are also discussed, they are peripheral to these novels. Appendix B shares charts of the different ways the sampled young adult and middle grade novels included or re-presented myth according to the realms and chapters presented in this study.

The Significance of This Study

This study is the culmination of several years of work, done to the best of my ability with as much as my inartistically-inclined hands could offer. I questioned whether myth, according to these children’s novels, should be regarded as religion, history, fantasy or something else. The way myth is defined, situated, discussed and regarded influences how it is used and understood in the classroom and beyond: Whether myth consists of allegorical tales to help socialize children, whether it is the beliefs of cultures lost to time or whether it is a part of the way present-day Americans understand and position themselves or are positioned by others within their own cultures influences how readers may take in the lessons, meanings and criticisms embedded in the novels that incorporate mythic elements. Critically analyzing myths, whether traditional, modern or new stories that people use to position themselves within the world and to understand who they are is essential to viewing the underlying meanings we give to myth and the tensions and questions readers may pick-up or make their own based on their readings of some of the young adult and children’s novels included within this study.

These are the questions and tensions that will be explored throughout this study
and could also be contemplated in broader contexts. The young adult and children’s novels within this study, those that include figures of myth as characters in present-day realistic settings, complicate these questions, often presenting possibilities and ideas to young readers about their own culture, about history, about faith and about themselves. These re-presentations are often done in ways that critique aspects of the culture explored by the novels and in ways that position the protagonists and, by extension the reader, in diverse situations and encourage them to consider the ways they are positioned and position others within their own lives. Researching the way myth is presented in recently published young adult and children’s novels set in the present-day has helped me better understand the world, my culture and myself as a reader and researcher. I hope that it can provide similar insights for my readers.
Chapter One: That’s a myth! Or is it? The many meanings of a word

Devil’s Kiss series
Fallen series
Halo series
Iris, Messenger
Oh.My.Gods. duology
Percy Jackson series
Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy

“This is what myths do. We stand guard over Chaos.”
“I thought your main job was explaining things,” Ilana said. “You know, like What makes the seasons change? Or What causes lightning? Or Why is the world a mess?”
“That’s part of it,” said Ratatosk. “Myths help keep the forces of the cosmos in balance; we let you see them in perspective.”

~Ratatosk the Norse Dark Squirrel of Doom to Ilana
Esther Friesner, Temping Fate, 2006, pp. 233-234

A myth is not always a myth; at least, not when speaking about one of the many modern definitions for the term. The meaning of the word has shifted over time and from culture to culture. Because of this, myth is a difficult term to define. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, a scholar of religious history, writes, “it is impossible to define a myth, but it is cowardly not to try” (1995, p. 25). I would not want to be thought cowardly.

To establish a beginning point for defining myth, I turned to the Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1996), because, while ignoring the preference to look up definitions online on the part of many twenty-first century readers, a dictionary is a
common source for such information. Five definitions of myth are listed:

1. a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, esp. one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature. 2. stories or matter of this kind: realm of myth. 3. any invented story, idea or concept: His account of the event is pure myth. 4. an imaginary or fictitious thing or person. 5. an unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution. (p. 1272, emphasis present in text)

Throughout all five of these definitions is the sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious implication that myth is falsehood. There are varied nuances between defining a myth as “imaginary,” “fictitious,” “unproved” and “false.” False means something is proved to not be true or to not exist. “Unproved” still allows for the possibility of existence. Fictitious and imaginary both have the implication that something could be untrue or not real.

In this chapter, I will explore this issue of belief as well as the way myth has been defined within several different schools of thought and in comparison to other story forms or genres. These examinations establish the history and larger context of how myth has been positioned within larger dialogues of faith and analysis and provides a point of contrast to the expanded realms of myth within my sample that will be examined in chapters three through seven.
Myth and Belief

The aforementioned definitions of myth fail to account for the fact that historically, people have believed in myth as the sacred histories or religious stories of cultures (Malinowski, 1976, p. 28; Eliade, 1976, p. 3). As a present-day instance, Santa Claus could be an example of the Webster’s Dictionary’s fourth definition, “an imaginary or fictitious thing or person,” yet when they were children, many people in certain cultures believed he is real. On Christmas morning, I once swore to my skeptical father that I had heard reindeer on our roof the previous night. I had complete faith that Santa Claus, sometimes referred to as “the ‘deity’ of materialism” (Belk, 1993, p. 82; Miller, 1993, p. 20), was real.

This issue of belief or non-belief may be a central factor to why only certain stories with gods are acquired or played with by present-day children’s authors. It is very rare to see the figures of contemporary religions incorporated into children’s novels and their significance and status as gods played with. (I will discuss the novels that do include such characters more extensively in Chapter Four.)

Pullman’s His Dark Materials trilogy (1995, 1997, 2000) is one of the few examples of this literary trend of including characters of myth in present-day settings that use figures from contemporary religions or myths and, as noted in the Introduction, the series’ presence in schools and libraries in the United States has been challenged (Pilkington, 2009). I have yet to find cases that challenge any of the novels within my official sample of 40 middle grade and young adult novels published between 2005 and 2010. Personally, this surprised me. Henry Reichman notes in his examination of
censorship in schools that the ways some people link works they find “morally objectionable to propagation of an allegedly anti-Christian religion have not ceased” (2001, p. 59). I thought the inclusion of gods from other eras as powerful figures in fiction would upset some. Amy McClure notes that advocates of children’s books that incorporate religious or folkloric figures “contend that some of the most popular and memorable stories, those that help us explore the taproots of our existence as humans, are drawn from fantasy and folklore and these stories tend to be more comforting than scary” (1995, p. 6). Perhaps it is because the children’s novels that feature these gods of myth are often classified as fantasy or because these figures are no longer associated with belief that they can be acquired and played with.

Not only does this touch upon the fact that some authors and publishers may fear censorship by addressing or challenging popularly held religious beliefs, but it leads to the question of what is belief. What does it mean to believe in a particular story? Is this question of belief, of considering one idea true and another false, the dividing line between myth and religion? And what is truth? Is there only one truth or are there many truths depending upon the individual, context and culture? Most of the novels I read for my study avoided direct discussion of whether or not the gods incorporated were to be believed in or not or whether they were to challenge the gods or God of popular contemporary religions or myths.

Instead, the human protagonists in my sample are often asked to remember the gods. In the young adult novel, Thief Eyes (2010) by Janni Lee Simner, the protagonist Haley travels to Iceland in search of her mother who disappeared the previous year. While there, she meets Freki one of the four animals that serves the god Odin. Freki
informs her, “So long as you remember me in this world, I will return to it” (p. 217). This connects the continuing relevance and existence of the gods to memory instead of to belief. Remembering someone or something is often understood as a way of keeping that person, character or idea alive. Is attaching these gods’ continuing presence in culture to memory a way of avoiding discussion over what modern-day readers might believe to be true?

Both the Halo series (Adornetto, 2010) and Devil’s Kiss series (Chadda, 2009, 2010) do incorporate issues of faith in the Islamic Judeo-Christian God through their incorporation of angels as characters. In Adornetto’s Halo, the protagonist Bethany and her siblings, including the archangel Gabriel, who is “a warrior—his celestial name meant “Hero of God”—and it was he who had watched Sodom and Gomorrah burn” (2010, p. 16) come to the town of Venus Cove with a mission. The angelic siblings, Bethany, Ivy and Gabriel, discuss their mission and their approach:

It had been decided that a school would be a useful place to begin our work of countering the emissaries of darkness, given it was full of young people whose values were still evolving. Ivy was too unearthly to be herded off to high school, so it was agreed that she would mentor us and ensure our safety, or rather, my safety, as Gabriel could look after himself.

“The important thing is not to lose sight of why we’re here,” Ivy said. “Our mission is clear: to perform good deeds, acts of charity and kindness; to lead by example. We don’t want any miracles just yet, not until we can predict how they would be received. At the same time we want to observe and learn as much as we can about people. Human culture is so complex and different from anything else
“Essentially we are trying to drive away the evil influences and restore people’s faith in each other,” said Ivy…

“In short, we are here to bless the community,” my brother continued. “But we mustn’t appear too conspicuous. Our first priority is to remain undetected. Bethany, please try not to say anything that will…unsettle the students.”

It was my turn to be offended.

“Like what?” I demanded. “I’m not that scary.”

“You know what Gabriel means,” said Ivy. “All he’s suggesting is that you think before you speak. No personal talk about home, no ‘God reckons’…or ‘God told me’…they might think you’re on something.” (pp. 21-22, emphasis present in text)

Since the protagonist, who is also the narrator, is an angel who regularly speaks of Church and “Our Father,” a Christian viewpoint is assumed throughout the story. There is also a focus on the idea that young people are still developing their stance on the world. The angels’ goal is to restore faith in God and people’s faith toward one another by example, although later miracles are also performed.

In contrast, Michael in Devil’s Kiss (2009), also an archangel like Gabriel, has fallen to Earth in Chadda’s reimagining of the character. Michael is concerned with restoring faith in God, but as the antagonist in the series, his approach is different from the angels in Adornetto’s Halo. While first discussing how accidents happen with the protagonist Billi and how events may be beyond people’s control, Michael, or Mike as he is initially referred to while still in disguise as an ordinary teenage boy, begins to hint at
his plan to cause people to suffer in the hope of restoring their faith in God:


Mike stiffened. “Why is it they call them that? Acts of God?”

“Call what?”

“Disasters. Catastrophes. When something terrible happens, it’s always an Act of God. Why is that?” …“I’ll tell you why. It’s when people are afraid, they turn to Him. They remember that their lives continue purely because of His whim.” He snapped his fingers. The crack was as loud as a gunshot. “Lives that could end in an instant”…“It takes a terrible thing to remind people of their obligations to God. The more terrible, the better. Wouldn’t it be something if that happened?”

“What happened?”

“Something so terrible that everyone returned to Him. To fill the churches on Sunday instead of Ikea. To fill the mosques, the synagogues.” He spread out his arms. “An Act of God that would restore faith.” (2009, pp. 137-138)

Michael is giving one explanation of why bad things happen. He goes on to mention a girl, Rebecca, who is slowly dying in a hospital because of his efforts to restore faith through suffering. Billi hopes to save the girl, but Michael notes the impact Rebecca’s illness has had on her family:

“Do you know, Rebecca’s mother prays constantly now?”

He knew? He knew they’d been to China Wharf hospital? Oh God, what a fool she’d been.
Michael leaned closer. “Just think how much harder she’ll pray once Rebecca
dies. Think of the thousands, millions of prayers and souls I’ll send to Him after I
release the Tenth Plague.” He looked up into the cloud-swollen sky. “God
cannot ignore me then.” He reached up with his free hand while gazing into the
darkness. “He will take me back. He must.” (p. 144)

The archangel Michael’s underlying goal is to attract God’s attention, wanting God to
acknowledge him and allow him to return to Heaven. Michael’s plan parallels the
Biblical plague that killed the first-born in Ancient Egypt.

In both the Halo and Devil’s Kiss series, the nature of faith is explored. The
readers are not called to have faith in the figures, since in both cases, the characters
already accept the truth of the traditional myths being explored in the modern settings.
Rather, the reader’s task is to experience the position of certainty of belief, to suspend
disbelief and enter the realities of the stories and be positioned as characters who are not
searching for faith, but rather are confident in the truth of their perception of the world, a
change from many of the other protagonists who must adjust their understanding of the
world when they encounter the figures of myth.

Faith and love.

In the cases of Adornetto’s Halo (2010) and Lauren Kate’s Fallen series (2009,
2010), when belief is explored and questioned, it is faith in heterosexual romantic love
that the protagonists pursue. The female characters are frightened and feel uncertain
about love and trusting or having faith in their male love interests. Fallen (Kate, 2009) is
the story of Luce Price who, after she is unable to explain her role in a fire that killed a teenage boy, is sent to a reform boarding school, Sword & Cross. She describes herself as agnostic to her new school’s librarian:

“I didn’t have a religious upbringing. My parents didn’t believe in it, so—”

“Everyone believes in something. Surely you were baptized?”

“No, if you don’t count the swimming pool built under the church pew over there,” Luce said timidly, jerking her thumb toward Sword & Cross’s gym [which was built in a Civil War era church]. Yeah, she celebrated Christmas, she’d been to church a handful of times, and even when her life made her and everyone around her miserable, she still had faith that there was someone or something up there worth believing in. That had always been enough for her. (p. 377)

When Luce learns that she is falling in love with a fallen angel, Daniel, it is not a Judeo-Christian God she commits her belief to, but rather the myth of her eternal love for Daniel. Love is also the reason he fell from Heaven. He tries to inform Luce:

“In the Bible…”

Luce groaned. She couldn’t help it; she had a kneejerk reaction to Sunday school talk. Besides, she wanted to discuss the two of them, not some moralistic parable. The Bible wasn’t going to hold the answers to any of the questions she had about Daniel.

“Just listen,” he said, shooting her a look. “In the Bible, you know how God makes a big deal about how everyone should love him with all their soul? How it has to be unconditional, and unrivaled?”
Luce shrugged. “I guess so.”

“Well—” Daniel seemed to be searching for the right words. “That request doesn’t only apply to people.”

“What do you mean? Who else? Animals?”

“Sometimes, sure,” Daniel said. “Like the serpent. He was damned after he tempted Eve. Cursed to slither on the ground forever.”

…I’m trying to say…I guess you could say I’m damned, too, Luce. I’ve been damned for a long, long time.” He spoke as if the words tasted bitter. “I made a choice once, a choice that I believed in—that I still believe in…” (pp. 348-349)

As Daniel confesses that he is an immortal fallen angel, he implies that it was because his soul did not love only God that he fell. He also informs Luce that since he fell centuries before, he falls in love with her every 17 years, as Luce reincarnates in different places around the world and grows to be a teen only to meet him and then die in his presence each cycle. Daniel informs her as he reveals the truth of their past love:

“You said yourself you felt as if you knew me. I tried to deny it as long as I could because I knew this would happen.”

“I felt I knew you from somewhere, sure,” she said. Now her voice was clotted with fear. “Like the mall or summer camp or something. Not some former life.”

She shook her head. “No…I can’t.”

She covered her ears. Daniel uncovered them.

“And yet you know in your heart it’s true.” He clasped her knees and looked her deeply in the eye. “You knew it when I followed you to the top of Corcovado in Rio, when you wanted to see the statue up close. You knew it when I carried you
two sweaty miles to the River Jordan after you got sick outside Jerusalem. I told you not to eat all those dates. You knew it when you were my nurse in that Italian hospital during the first World War, and before that when I hid in your cellar during the tsar’s purge of St. Petersburg. When I scaled the turret of your castle in Scotland during the Reformation, and danced you around and around at the king’s coronation ball at Versailles. You were the only woman dressed in black. There was that artists’ colony in Quintana Roo, and the protest march in Cape Town where we both spent the night in the pen. The opening of the Globe Theatre in London. We had the best seats in the house. And when my ship wrecked in Tahiti, you were there, as you were when I was a convict in Melbourne, and a pickpocket in eighteenth-century Nimes, and a monk in Tibet. You turn up everywhere, always, and sooner or later you sense all the things I’ve just told you. But you won’t let yourself accept what you feel might be the truth.”

(pp. 356-357, emphasis present in text)

As Luce mulls over what Daniel reveals to her, she thinks about her current preferences:

Maybe Luce couldn’t exactly remember the moments he’d described or the places he mentioned, but in a strange way, his words weren’t shocking at all. It was all somehow familiar.

For example, she had always inexplicably hated dates. Even the sight of them made her feel queasy. She’d started claiming she was allergic so her mom would stop trying to sneak them into things she baked. (pp. 362-363)

It is because of this sense of familiarity that she begins to believe what Daniel has told her. She acknowledges the way the past has influenced her as a person. Then, instead of
committing herself to the God Daniel acknowledges exists, she commits herself to faith in her eternal love for Daniel. Luce thinks to herself:

…They were at the start of something long and significant and hard.

Together.

And whether the battles were gruesome or redemptive or both, Luce didn’t want to be a pawn any longer. A strange feeling was working its way through her body—one steeped in all her past lives, all the love she’d felt for Daniel that had been extinguished too many times before.

It made Luce want to stand up next to him and fight. Fight to stay alive long enough to live out her life next to him. Fight for the only thing she knew that was good enough, noble enough, powerful enough to be worth risking everything.

Love. (p. 448)

Luce’s love for Daniel is what motivates her. It informs the choices she makes and her worldview.

Similarly, while the protagonist, Bethany, in the novel Halo (Adornetto, 2010), is certain of her faith in God, it is in establishing a romantic relationship with a boy named Xavier Woods that she struggles to commit to and to make work within her worldview that an angel cannot have such affection for one human. She ruminates on the concept of love:

One of the most frustrating words in the human language, as far as I could tell, was love. So much meaning attached to this one little word. People bandied it about freely, using it to describe their attachments to possessions, pets, vacation destinations, and favorite foods. In the same breath they then applied this word to
the person they considered most important in their lives. Wasn’t that insulting? Shouldn’t there be some other term to describe deeper emotion? Humans were so preoccupied with love. They were all desperate to form an attachment to one person they could refer to as their “other half.” It seemed from my reading of literature that being in love meant becoming the beloved’s entire world. The rest of the universe paled into insignificance compared to the lovers. When they were separated, each fell into a melancholy state, and only when they were reunited did their hearts start beating again. Only when they were together could they really see the colors of the world. When they were apart, that color leached away, leaving everything a hazy gray. I lay in bed, wondering about the intensity of this emotion that was so irrational and so irrefutably human. What if a person’s face was so sacred to you it was permanently inscribed in your memory? What if their smell and touch were dearer to you than life itself? (pp. 12-13, emphasis present in text)

Bethany finds romantic love and experiences these realities for herself. Throughout the novels within my sample, although many of the books avoided directly addressing issues of faith and belief in the gods of various traditional myths, they found other forms of belief to explore. Most of the young adult novels within my sample that feature angels, do not focus on religious belief, rather they present the myth of the experience of first romantic heterosexual love to young readers; to the fears and jealousies of a female character committing herself to another, an often seemingly dangerous male character.
Faith as a frame for identity formation and positioning.

Guardian of the Dead (2010) by Karen Healey does have a suggestion for the way in which personal stories and personal mythologies become belief. After the protagonist, Ellie Spencer, learns that the creatures and gods of Māori myth are influencing New Zealand, where the novel is set, and that she has the double vision to see both the real world and the world of the mists, or mythic places, she discusses with her classics teacher, La Gribaldi, an American who has lived in many countries and grew up hearing the myths of Ancient Greece and Rome, the way believed stories—whether myth, religion or literature—may influence a person and the way she views the world. La Gribaldi converses with Ellie:

“…What do you see when you look at the moon?”

I looked at the sky. “The sad woman. Who can’t get back down [from Māori myth].”

“Quite so. That’s a strong story here. My father was Italian, and when we left Eritrea for Rome, he would sit outside and smoke and tell me stories: about his father’s farm; about the war; about the gods. My favorite was the myth of Selene, who drives the chariot of the moon. She loved many men, but she loved beautiful Endymion best, and begged the father of the gods to give him immortality. This was granted, but Endymion sleeps eternally. Selene treasures him still and rises every night she can, so that she might kiss him with the beams of her light.

“Now look.”

I did. For a moment I saw it, the woman eagerly driving her silver chariot across
the sky. The image wavered, and it was just the moon, a near-circle of white light; and then the anguished woman returned, clutching the trees on which she’d stubbed her toe.

“It changes,” I said, astonished.

La Gribaldi laid her hand on my shoulder. I could feel the warmth radiating from her skin, like the heat stored in sun-baked earth. “Stories change us; they change the world. People are stories of themselves.”

I squinted, my head spinning. “Like…history is written by the victors?”

She nodded, looking somber. “Or erased by them. Ms. Spencer, the stories we know are real things. Especially for people like ourselves. Remember that.” (p. 267)

The stories that the characters in this novel believe, that people have faith in and are influenced by, the ones they use to form their identities, position themselves in the world, the ones they call true, the ones they rely upon explain and shape their world and themselves.

This idea extends beyond Guardian of the Dead and into scholarship. Not only do people construct their perception of and position in a reality and culture with stories about scientific inquiry, Jesus, Muhammad, Moses, Buddha, Zeus and Odin, but they also internalize the stories of how their ancestors arrived in a certain country, fought in certain wars, built certain bridges. People use the stories of how they got a nickname, what their first word was and whether or not their parents loved them or loved each other to contribute to their identity, to this understanding of reality, to their positions in the world. They also make meaning with literature. Together such stories help to position a person
within the world and help that person to choose who to be.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) have defined and explored the idea of the way an individual internalizes reality and how other people influence it with language, creating a social reality. They define internalization as “the immediate apprehension or interpretation of an objective event as expressing meaning, that is, as a manifestation of another’s subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful to” a person (p. 119). In the case of Guardian of the Dead (Healey, 2010), Ellie sees the moon and has her own subjective interpretation based upon her knowledge of and exposure to Māori myth. Then, after hearing the language of her teacher’s subjective interpretation based upon Greek mythology, Elli’s internalization of her observation is influenced by the way she socially constructed reality with La Gribaldi.

Staying with the concept of identity formation, in their exploration of the way researchers examine identity and its use when examining literacy, Elizabeth Birr Moje and Allen Luke (2009) note five commonly used metaphors: identity posited as “(1) difference, (2) sense of self/subjectivity, (3) mind or consciousness, (4) narrative, and (5) position” (p. 419). Within this study, I focus on narrative and position and follow the stances of Louis Althusser (1971), Stanton Wortham (2001), Dorothy Holland, William Lachicotte Jr. Debra Skinner and Carole Cain (1998) among others, I assume the stance, the same one taken up in Guardian of the Dead (Healey, 2010), that a reader’s identity is shaped by the narratives of myth they hear or see and ascribe belief to. Such myths may be ancient or new, presented as religion, personal stories, larger stories within a culture or community, novels, videos, songs, folklore, etc.

Interested in humanist ideology and Marxist-Leninist politics, Althusser examined
class positioning and considered it to be a “consciousness” and a “practice” (1971, p. 13).
Most of the novels within my sample feature protagonists and lower middle class or middle class consciousness or assumptions of experience and knowledge. If the readers are from one such background or are accustomed to these positions, they may practice it and embrace the novels’ positioning with little questioning.

I also assume that these narratives and myths position people within their understandings of the world. Such positions are social, relational, and focus upon language and discourse to represent and give meaning to identity and as people are positioned in certain ways by language and by others, they “imagine future positions and their future selves moving within and across those positions” (Moje & Luke p. 427, 430).

I argue that the language and ideologies within the young adult and middle grade novels of my sample position the reader and allow her to imagine various positions within and about myth.

As an example, Anne Ursu’s middle grade trilogy the Cronus Chronicles (2006, 2007, 2009) positions the reader among a number of different perspectives within the narration. In the second novel, *The Siren Song* (2007), the story re-presents the Greek god Poseidon:

Once upon a time, it used to be that any sane person who ventured out on the seas would, before he embarked on his journey, make a sacrifice to Poseidon. It was only sensible. Since Poseidon is the second most powerful god in the whole Universe, you want to be as respectful to him as you possibly can be. Because you, after all, are a lowly mortal, no greater than sea scum on the tooth of a snaggle-toothed snake eel, of no more significance than a scale on the butt of a
bottom-feeding dwarf suckermouth catfish—except the scum on the snake eel and the scale on the catfish butt both have the blessed privilege of being of the sea and therefore created by Poseidon himself, whereas you were made by Prometheus, a mortal-loving Titan freak, and nobody asked Poseidon whether we needed humans anyway, and you’re lucky he doesn’t drown you when you take a bath. Because he could, you know. And then you’d be sorry.

…All [Poseidon] wants is a little respect. You can’t blame Poseidon; if you were the second most powerful god in the whole Universe (which you’re not, obviously, because Poseidon is. And you’re clearly not the first most, because then you’d be Zeus, and that guy has never read a book in his life) you’d want a little reverence and fear too. (pp. 141-143)

In this passage, the reader is positioned to understand a god’s perspective; specifically Poseidon’s. Using direct addresses to an implied reader, the narrative also positions the reader from the perspective of a lowly man from “once upon a time” who would have had faith in the Greek gods and from the position of someone who in the present day does not. By including all of these positions of status and power, the reader may play with different perspectives and understandings of the world and of how they may view the significance of a god. (I explore this in more depth in Chapter Eight.)

**Faith, Religion and Myth**

For the purposes of this study, it is also important to know that I treat the religions commonly believed and practiced today, in the early twenty-first century, to be on the
same standing as those stories traditionally defined as myth. Moojan Momen (1999) mentions that religion is based upon the “experience of the ‘holy’ or the ‘sacred’ (p. 21), the same as myth. Momen also provides a functional definition for religion, stating, “Religion is that which provides humanity with a worldview which unifies society, which provides a moral code, and within which human beings can orient their lives” (p. 28). Momen notes that other ideologies, like Marxism, fulfill the criteria for this definition (p. 28). This expansive and functional definition works within the context of my study, since I examine how many ideologies may be perceived as worldviews or paradigms (See Chapters Four and Five). One of my tasks in undertaking this study was to determine how these children’s novels positioned myth in relation to religion, although most seemed to attempt to avoid making distinctions or unifications.

With contemporary religions, the historical fact of their origins is also called into question. David Fontana, who has examined the connections between religion, myth, art and human psychology, notes that when exploring the historical facts surrounding the founding of religions that:

Although many of the stories surrounding the founders of the world’s religions and their most prominent followers might owe more to the inventiveness of those who set them down than to historical fact, they may nevertheless convey an accurate picture of the states of mind, the moral and ethical teachings, and the insights into spiritual realities of the men and women concerned. (2003, p. 105)

Whether believed by many or by few, whether remembered by all or by a handful, religion, myth, science, personal narratives, etc. are all paradigms of belief that consist of stories that explain the way the world may be understood. (I explore this perspective in
Although all of the modern-day definitions from *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1996) cited at the opening of this chapter imply myth as being untrue or unreal, they all fail to address this history of belief that is an integral part of the way people understand myth. Despite common exclamations of people today saying, “That’s just a myth,” accompanied by the dismissive wave of a hand, myth has not always been associated with falsehood, especially if the term is examined historically.

**Myth and Plato: An examination of one historical perspective**

In ancient Greece and Rome, the word *mythos* was used in Hesiod’s accounts of the gods. In the *Theogony* (2004), Hesiod, an early Greek poet, describes his poem as originating with the Muses, stating, “The goddesses first spoke forth this *mythos* to me, / The Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus” (Lincoln, 1999, p. 15, emphasis present in text). Another translation of these lines is, “Here are the words the daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus, the Muses of Olympos, first spoke to me” (Hesiod, 2004, p. 11, lines 24-25). These are words of authority, meant to attract the listeners and readers’ attention and to encourage them to interpret Hesiod’s following accounts of the gods as truth.

Mythos is also used in Homer’s oral epic, *The Iliad* (1950). Richard P. Martin (1989), a Classics scholar who has focused much of his work on speech and poetics, reports that *mythos* or “muthos” was a speech-act in the Homeric epics, “indicating authority, performed at length, usually in public, with a focus on full attention to every
detail” (p. 12). Mythos, then, consists of words of power, to be believed and even obeyed.

Plato, however, argued to change this in the dialogues within his work *The Republic* (2003), which may be viewed as “an attack on the existing educational apparatus of Greece” (Havelock, 1967, p. 13). A philosopher in the 400 and 300 BCE in Ancient Greece, Plato objected to telling lies about the gods, and found the way they were presented in myths by many poets to be problematic. He contrasted *mythos*, or stories, with the idea of true history and argument, or *logos* (O’Flaherty, 1995, p. 25).

Part of Plato’s critique of mythos could have been due to the fact that, when shared, myth was orally performed, with the direct relationship between the performer and audience and in a “social space in which the singer performs shap[ing] each retelling from the outside” (Nagy, 2004, p. 84).

Although all of the novels in my sample privilege written versions of myth, since they themselves are written, a few of the books do try to accommodate myth’s history of orality. Rick Riordan’s the Kane Chronicles, which presents the magic and gods of Ancient Egypt in modern times, presents the brother and sister narrators of the series, Carter and Sadie Kane, as having digitally recorded their accounts of their adventures in the first novel, *The Red Pyramid* (2010a). The peritext of the novel includes a “Warning” that the story is “a transcript of a digital recording” (no pagination) in a potential attempt to accommodate myth’s history of being shared orally.

In the novel *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010) when one of the characters, Mark who is a mythic creature, retells a Māori myth to explain “how mankind was made, and how death entered the world” (p. 168) to help establish why the lives of people like
Ellie, are threatened now, his oral rendition of the myth is described positively, even though the reader can only imagine the sound of his voice. Ellie narrates as he speaks:

I gaped at him. The words had rolled out in a low, passionate flow, his usually ordinary voice becoming something rich and compelling, lightly accented. In that voice, the familiar story was transformed into a living epic of intense fascination.

(p. 169)

Ellie also notes that he conjured “vivid images with his voice” (p. 170). These inclusions of myths being shared orally accommodate myth’s history of being transmitted through this medium, even though Plato might have criticized such a use. Gregory Nagy argues that Plato judges the oral performance framework as “incapable of producing philosophical knowledge and of educating the young” (2004, p. 84). His argument extends to the way the gods are portrayed in such performances. Philosopher Simon Blackburn summarizes Plato’s objections in *The Republic* to the way poets presented the gods:

In Greek myths, and in Homer himself, the gods take on different shapes. They are a pretty rough bunch. Zeus the top god, is prone to rape and to what we would call paedophilia. He constantly cheats on his wife Hera. The gods scheme and interfere with each other’s plans. They are deceived and deceiving, prey to human passions like lust, anger, jealousy and envy, and are generally portrayed as carrying on much as people do. Plato is shocked by this on two counts. First, the gods are presented as less than perfect. And second, and perhaps more importantly, they are presented as changing.

It is here that Plato first strikes a note that becomes central later: since the divine
nature is perfect it cannot be changed by external agency. (2006, pp. 59-60)

Plato desires that the gods be represented in their true, perfect, unchanging state. He argues, using the voice of Socrates, that poets should not misrepresent the gods to people. Rather, in Plato’s Republic, the gods must be represented as perfect constants, incapable of deception or falsehood and as “the cause of good” (Plato, 2003, p. 71, p. 76). While talking with Adeimantus, Socrates states, “God must surely always be represented as he really is, whether the poet is writing epic, lyric, or tragedy” (p. 71). Socrates goes on to assert that “god must be held to be [the] sole cause of good, we must look for some factors other than god as cause of the evil” (p. 71). Because of this postulate, Plato has Socrates argue that since Homer portrays Zeus as a dispenser of good and evil, that “we” cannot approve of his work for the Republic he imagines. With these accusations, mythos and story begin to be associated with falsehood.

Because of Plato’s argument, a scholar of religious history and a contributor to theories on myth, Mercia Eliade dubbed Plato, “the first great demythologizer” (O’Flaherty, 1995; Eliade, 1963). While Plato did recognize the power of myth in influencing human life, he fears a “bad myth will make a bad life” (O’Flaherty, 1995, p. 26) by not providing proper influences or guidance. (Following Zeus’s behavior, a person may choose to cheat on his or her spouse, for example.)

Plato critiques and deconstructs the works of Hesiod and Homer and argues, through the character Socrates, to banish them and other myth-making poets from his Republic. When discussing the stories of Homer and Hesiod, Socrates says they are guilty of “the worst fault possible,” that of “misrepresenting the nature of gods and heroes, like a portrait painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to their originals”
Later in *The Republic*, Plato goes on to form his own myth, The Myth of Er, which he considers more appropriate. In the myth, Er is a brave man who is killed in battle, who then awakens twelve days later, a prophet ready to share his experience of life after death. Socrates reports, that according to Er, the dead must be punished for their wrongs:

> For every wrong he has done to anyone a man must pay the penalty in turn, ten time for each, that is to say, once every hundred years, this being reckoned as the span of a man’s life. He pays, therefore, tenfold retribution for each crime.

(2003, p. 362)

After, paying ten times for their crimes and after those who have “done good and been just and god-fearing” (p. 362) are rewarded by the same tenfold proportion, Er sees the structure of the world and then witnesses a lottery in which the dead select their next lives. A man like Agamemnon, the Greek King who led soldiers against Troy in the Trojan war, “who also because of his sufferings hated humanity” (p. 367) chooses to be an eagle in his next life. Odysseus, who was last to choose his new life in the Myth of Er, is also influenced by his former life in his selection:

> The memory of his former sufferings had cured him of all ambition and he looked round for a long time to find the uneventful life of an ordinary man; at last he found it lying neglected by the others, and when he saw it he chose it with joy and said that had his lot fallen first he would have made the same choice. (p. 367)

Plato creates a myth to re-present familiar figures of myth and story as having learned from their experiences in life and in the accounts from the poets that he wishes to
dismiss. By including this myth, through Socrates’s narration to a man named Glaucon, O’Flaherty notes that Plato is admitting, “that a myth says something that cannot be said in any other way, that cannot be translated into a logical or even a metaphysical statement. A myth says something that can only be said in a story” (1995, p. 27, emphasis present in text). This critique of poets’ presentations of the gods and offer of his own myth sets Plato in an interesting position. Rather than leave people with no stories of the gods, Plato contradicts himself by creating the Myth of Er and finds it necessary to construct new myths to guide people, possibly acknowledging the power of story and myth to engage people. Thus the demythologizer becomes the “Remythologizer” (O’Flaherty, 1995, p. 26). Plato understands the power of myth, of story, to influence people and because of this, he wishes to censor which myths people hear.

Plato is not the only one to have attempted to re-mythologize a culture. Other writers continue to remake the world through new or re-imagined myths to this day. And some of those who do, particularly young adult and children’s authors included within my sample, seem to bring myth to life for young readers. In Lauren Kate’s Fallen series (2009, 2010), the protagonist Luce reincarnates as deceased characters from history and myth do within Plato’s Myth of Er. Luce is unable to remember her past lives. Within the second novel of the series, Torment (2010), she realizes the importance of remembering history. When contemplating the assumption that the past has no value in reference to her relationship with the fallen angel Daniel, she thinks:

If that were true, it would mean that all of Luce’s former lives didn’t add up to anything, that her history with Daniel was also worthless. So all she’d have to go
on was what she knew of Daniel in this lifetime. And was that really enough?

No. It wasn’t.

She had to believe there was more to what she felt for Daniel: a valuable, locked-away history that added up to something bigger than a few nights of blissful kissing and a few more nights of arguing. Because if the past had no value, that was really all they had. (p. 149)

As Luce commits to learning about and from her past lives, she turns to the shadows she has always seen, Announcers of past events, to learn about herself. One of her teachers, an angel named Steven, at her new boarding school, Shorline, cautions her not to trust the images the shadows reveal to her. Torment along with several other novels in my sample, draw upon works of Plato to reinforce the story’s own stance on myth, reality and truth. Steven draws upon Plato’s Allegory of the Cave to make his argument:

He pulled down a thick book with a dusty red cover and brought it back to the desk. Plato: The Republic. Steven opened it to the exact page he’d been looking for, turning the book right side up in front of Luce.

It was an illustration of a group of men inside a cave, shackled beside one another, facing a wall. A fire blazed behind them. They were pointing at the shadows cast on the wall by a second group of men who walked behind them.

Below the image, a caption read: The Allegory of the Cave.

“What is this?” Luce asked. Her knowledge of Plato started and ended with the fact that he palled around with Socrates.

“Proof of why your name for the Announcers is actually quite smart.” Steven pointed at the illustration. “Imagine that these men spend their lives seeing only
the shadows on this wall. They come to understand the world and what happens in it from these shadows. They don’t even understand that what they are seeing are shadows.”

She looked just beyond Steven’s finger to the second group of men. “So they can never turn around, never see the people and things creating the shadows?”

“Exactly. And because they can’t see what is actually casting the shadows, they assume that what they can see—these shadows on the wall—are reality. They have no idea that the shadows are mere representations and distortions of something much truer and more real.” He paused. “Do you understand why I’m telling you this?”

Luce shook her head. “You want me to stop messing with the Announcers?”

Steven closed the book with a snap, then crossed to the other side of the room. She felt as if she’d disappointed him somehow.

“Because I don’t believe you will stop…messing with the Announcers, even if I do ask you to. But I do want you to understand what you’re dealing with the next time you summon one. The Announcers are shadows of past events. They can be helpful, but they also contain some very distracting, sometimes dangerous distortions. (pp. 198-199, emphasis present in text)

This discussion parallels Plato’s argument over presentations of the gods. The children’s novels within my sample are all announcements of the ways myth and gods may still influence and be present in early twenty-first century life. Just as Luce must choose among the realities and see the ways that the representations of the past are distorted and choose how they will influence her identity and positions in the world, the reader may do
the same among the books they read and narratives they hear.

I am left to wonder what Plato would think of the ways gods are presented in the sample of children’s novels I examined for this study. As with the presentation of The Allegory of the Cave in *Torment* (2010), Plato would seem to argue that no shadows are preferable to ones that are potentially distorted or misleading representations of the gods. I would argue there is still value in these distorted presentations (especially when they are compared). Using one scene from the middle grade novel *Iris, Messenger* (2007) by Sarah Deming I would like to explore how Plato may have critiqued it and how I still see value in it even though the gods are both humanized and fallible.

After receiving a multi-colored shawl that allows her to travel by rainbow, Iris delivers a package from the Greek goddess Aphrodite to the goddess Hera, Zeus’s wife. The god Zeus, Iris discovers, is her real father, who she has never met before. Athena gives Iris Zeus’s address, writing to her, “Every heroine should understand where she comes from. This helps her decide where she is going” (p. 188), acknowledging the importance of knowing one’s history. Iris travels to Kensington to see that the king and queen of the Greek gods live “on a dreary block of row homes. Her father’s was the one with peeling aluminum siding” (p. 188).

After receiving permission to enter the house from Hera, Iris sees her father for the first time:

“He’s in the den, watching TV,” Hera said. “As usual.”

Iris followed the sound of the television. When she entered the den, her father’s back was to her. And so the first thing she noticed was how heavy he was. His flesh spilled out of his sweatpants and over the sides of the easy chair.
Iris coughed politely.

Without turning around, he shot out, “Where’s that beer I asked for?”

He thought she was Hera. “Um, I’d be happy to get you one if you tell me where they are.”

Zeus spun around in his chair and fixed Iris with huge, fierce eyes. Under the pressure of that gaze, all the hair on Iris’s body stood on end.

“Ohmm,” he said, looking her up and down. “Yeah, I remember. That pretty little scientist [Iris’s mother]. It was all Eros’s fault, that one. I hope you don’t think I’m gonna pay child support. Eros [the god of romantic love] should pay, if anybody.” Zeus turned back to the TV. “They’re in the fridge.”

“What?” she whispered.

“THE BEER. It’s in the fridge.”

Iris turned and numbly walked back down the hall. (pp. 191-192)

After returning to Zeus with a beer, he has trouble with the TV remote control, prompting him to call out for his wife:

“HEEEERAAAAA!” His voice rocked the foundations of the house. Dogs began barking across the street.

Hera leaned against the doorframe. “What.”

“The remote is busted again! How many times have I told you to be careful—”

“About as many times as I’ve told you to stay away from mortal wom—”

“What I do in my free time and who I hang out with is my own—”

“Not while I’m still queen of the gods it’s not.”

He raised a meaty hand in the air. “I’m warning you, Hera!”
“You’re warning me, what? You can barely stand up you’re so fat. Lay one hand on me and I call the police, Ares, and Hephaestus. And, by the way, look at me, will you? I look the best I’ve looked in hundreds of years! And do you notice? Not a thing. You only have eyes for that TV.” She stormed out. (pp. 192-193, emphasis present in text)

Iris’s disappointing meeting with her father seems as though she is meeting a stereotype of a deadbeat father and abusive husband. Plato would likely critique this portrayal of Zeus for being both an imperfect presentation of a god and for being too humanized. He would most likely not want this negative portrayal of the god to be shared within his Republic. Still, I argue, there is value in this presentation. Iris’s experience is relatable. This humanization and negative portrayal may still influence readers in a positive way, to caution them against behaving the way Zeus has, because Deming’s modern characterization of him clearly shows the consequences of the choices the god is portrayed as making in traditional myth. In Deming’s modern extrapolation of the married god and goddess’s relationship, they are both clearly unhappy with each other, warning the reader to not make the same choices Zeus has.

Seeing Iris’s interaction with her father and her eventual choice to know and be herself without seeking more of a relationship with Zeus may be inspiring to readers who have experienced having an absent or even abusive parent. For readers who may relate to Iris as they read about her overcoming her disappointment of meeting her father, an actual god, they may find catharsis in the experience of reading her story. Despite Plato’s potential criticisms, this modern re-presentation of Zeus may still be a story with positive influences for readers.
Myth in Scholarship

Whether meaning power, truth, story or falsehood; time is not the only factor that has shifted the significance of the word *myth*. How *myth* is used is also influenced by the culture, school of thought or even college department that uses the term. For example, in folklore, myth is often defined in comparison to or along side folktales and legends.

Folklorist, Alan Dundes briefly defines myth as:

A sacred narrative explaining how the world and mankind came to be in their present form. Myths and legends (narratives told as true and set in the postcreation era) are different from folktales, which are narratives understood to be fictional, often introduced as such by an opening formula such as “Once upon a time.” (1996, p. 147)

These distinctions among myth, legend and folktale have, according to Dundes, “been standard among folklorists for at least two centuries, going back to the publications of the brothers Grimm” (p. 147).

In fact, these differentiations are often shared in introductory folklore courses, usually in the form of a chart like Table 5:
Table 5: Folklore Categories

(Adapted from Calame, 2003, p. 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Principal Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myth</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Remote Past</td>
<td>Other/Earlier</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Nonhuman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Recent Past</td>
<td>Current World</td>
<td>Secular or</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folktale</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Any Time</td>
<td>Any Place</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Human or Nonhuman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categories in Table 5 are the most common ways to distinguish among myth, legend and folktale in American and European classrooms. While these differentiations appear clear and easily distinguishable, when reading or hearing narratives, whether from a person’s own culture or from a heretofore-unknown one, makes forming such distinctions more difficult.

It is important to note that this chart represents a recent interpretation of the folk categories presented in the 1960s (Calame, 2003, p. 9). In the early nineteenth-century, Calame writes that European researchers, like Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm and particularly James Frazer, focused on contrasting myth with legend and folktales. They understood myth to be “erroneous explanations of fundamental phenomena relating to man or to nature; they thus represent a first philosophy, a first science, but one marked by ignorance and error” (pp. 8-9).
Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson compiled a collection of many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers’ observations of myth. They note the shift in the meaning of the term:

Around 1700, the term *myth* meant mainly the inherited body of myths, principally, Greek and Roman; but this was gradually enlarged to include Indic, Nordic, African and indeed all mythologies, ancient and modern. Secondly, myth was often associated during this period with pagan religious beliefs and was contrasted with Christian religious belief. (1972, p. xxi, emphasis present in text)

While the initial focus of myth was upon those stories of Ancient Greece and Rome, the definition of myth expanded to include other cultures and was often compared with the Christian belief system. I would not say this is still the case today, but there is always potential for a shift back to this understanding as well as shifts to other paradigms.

Eliade (1960) has also noted about the shifting meaning of the term myth that within the nineteenth century, “‘myth’ meant anything that was opposed to ‘reality’” (p. 23). Eliade goes on to write about the construction of myth in contrast to Christianity in the nineteenth century:

According to primitive Christianity, everything which could not be justified by reference to one or the other of the two Testaments was untrue; it was a “fable”. But the researches of the ethnologists have obliged us to go behind this semantic inheritance from the Christian polemics against the pagan world. We are at last beginning to know and understand the value of the myth, as it has been elaborated in “primitive” and archaic societies—that is, among those groups of mankind where the myth happens to be the very foundation of social life and culture. Now,
one fact strikes us immediately: in such societies the myth is thought to express
the *absolute truth*, because it narrates a *sacred history*. (p. 23, emphasis present
in text)

Eliade gives voice to a transition in paradigm and in researchers’ more relativistic
approach to other cultures’ systems of belief.

Feldman and Richardson also note this transition, this pendulum swing to another
understanding of myth. They write:

…from the middle of the eighteenth century on, myth became increasingly caught
up in the movement usually characterized as romanticism. Myth was restudied,
radically revalued, and widely applied to practical ends in art, religion, history
and social theory. The revival of interest in the folk, the primitive, the archaic,
and the heroic all fed the interest in myth. Then too, myth often became, for the
nineteenth-century artist, a great source of new energy and power. (1972, p. xxi)

This seems to be the case in the current era as well. Young adult and children’s authors
are turning to myth and folklore for inspiration. Not only to tell stories, but to draw upon
these stories’ sense of history and power and to claim such a sense of authority in the
modern setting. By including figures from myth, these children’s novels join an ancient
and continuing dialogue about the nature of the world, myth, reality and humanity. This
sense of history, tradition and authority to share about the world with the reader is a
unique aspect of mythic narrative and its characters.

It is worth noting that folktales and legends have also been subject to twenty-first
century re-presentations in the same way that the myths explored in this study have been
re-acquired. For example, Meg Cabot’s *Avalon High* (2006) shares the legend of King
Arthur with most of the main characters reincarnated as high school students in Anapolis, Maryland, who must avoid repeating the mistakes of characters in the traditional legend. Jackson Pearce’s young adult novel *Sisters Red* (2010) depicts two sisters in the folktale characterization of Little Red Riding Hood who must fight men who transform into wolves, or fenris, as they search for a boy who could potentially turn into one of the monsters by having his “soul ripped away” (p. 87). For middle grade readers, Michael Buckley’s *The Sisters Grimm* series (2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010) imagines the characters and creatures from the Grimm fairy tales and other folktales, or “Everafters” (2005a, p. 69), as living in the fantastical town of Ferryport Landing, in New York state. The descendants of the Grimm brothers, Sabrina, Daphne and their grandmother, watch over the town and act as fairy tale detectives whenever anything unusual happens there.

This idea of acquiring, re-presenting, or reinterpreting myth and its characters in the way that the novels in my six-year sample do is far from new. In a verse letter, the Roman Critic, Horace, states:

> But literary property that belongs / to everybody / is the hardest / to invent well: poets who carve up / songs of ancient Troy, / constructing well-shaped plays, / work harder than poets who make it all up / as it falls on the page. (Horace, 1989, p. 70)

Horace notes the difficulty in including characters or events from stories commonly known, like some of the accounts of myth. Yet many writers take up this difficult task. Folklorist, Amy Shuman writes, “Stories do not exist in isolation, and it is impossible to prevent a story from being appropriated, reinterpreted, and recategorized” (2005, p. 19).
When writing about the role of myth in psychology and specifically within the Jungian school of thought, Wilson M. Hudson writes that myth is “a product of the collective unconscious expressed symbolically in archetypal images, and hence it is a universal natural phenomenon” (1996, p. 197). This definition focuses on the possible universality of myth. An archetype is a term closely associated with the work of Carl Jung and means the primordial types of the “universal images that have existed since the remotest times” in the collective unconscious of people’s minds (Jung, 2006, p. 5).

Writing about multicultural literature for children and young adults, Mingshui Cai notes the role archetypes may have with readers across cultures:

Archetypes, or universal themes, are undeniably a bridge to other people’s stories. Being able to enter the story world and relate to the characters is a step toward connecting to the culture represented in the story, but it does not mean that the reader has really crossed cultural borders. (2002, p. 125)

Drawing upon this, mythic archetypes and their connection to people’s collective unconscious are considered in advertising. Sal Randazzo (1993) writes:

As with any mythology, advertising mythologies can work on different levels. Most brand mythologies [or what a brand stands for in a consumer’s mind (p. 8)] function on a basic level to engage, entertain and amuse the consumer by “dressing up reality” and/or communicating product attributes and/or benefits. Many brand mythologies also function on a sociological level to reflect and reinforce our cultural values. Sometimes, brand mythologies even work on a spiritual or cosmological level to nourish the soul. (p. 50)

Considering a topic such as the advertisement of brands reinforces the multiple pragmatic
ways that the realm of myth is accessed and used in daily life.

This advertising mythology is demonstrated in the young adult novel *Oh.My.Gods.* (2008) by Tera Lynn Childs. Initially depicted as a normal teen who loves to run, the protagonist, Phoebe Castro, who hopes to get a running scholarship to college, always wears Nike running shoes, a brand which is named for the Greek goddess of victory. Upon seeing an exhibit of the sandals ancient Greek Olympians used to wear, while in Athens, Greece as she travels to the island of Serfopoula she thinks, “thank goodness for Nike. I could never run in sandals” (p. 23). This quirk of her characterization foreshadows the eventual realization that she is actually a descendent of the goddess Nike. From an advertising standpoint, if a reader wears Nike tennis shoes, she too could discover that she is the descendent of the Greek goddess of victory. This raises the question of why the names of Greek gods are associated with a sense of power that is meant to appeal to modern consumers and readers. Does wearing certain brands empower them or make them feel connected to an aspect of ancient history? This could become an avenue for future study.

**Myth in Education**

Myths are often considered beneficial when used with children. In an educational textbook intended for future teachers, children’s literature scholar and editor of *Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature* (2010) Barbara Z. Kiefer notes about comparative mythology that, “Children who compare myths may marvel at the human imagination and see the world in a different way. Comparing myths also often raises interesting
questions for children about the similarities, connections and migrations of early people” (p. 265). This hope for young readers to make connections among cultures encourages them to potentially perceive the universality of some myths.

Generally speaking, traditional myths are often shared with children. Rick Riordan, the author of the Percy Jackson, Kane Chronicles and Heroes of Olympus series, notes, “Young readers own mythology. They see themselves as the hero. They gain hope in their own struggles by following the quests. And yes, sometimes they even see their teachers as the monsters!” (2008b, p. x, emphasis present in text). Myth may spark children’s imaginations or help them to perceive the allegorical implications of the narratives and the emotional truths that thrive across time and culture.

Myths also serve to tell us about ourselves and our culture. Dundes notes the benefits of folklore in the classroom:

The various forms of folklore: myths, folktales, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, games, dances and many others can provide a vital resource for a teacher who seriously wishes to (1) understand his students better, and (2) teach those students more effectively about the world and about the human condition. For folklore is autobiographical ethnography—that is, it is a people’s own description of themselves. (2007, p. 55)

Since myths are some of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, they can be used in socializing children about the ways of their own culture and the ways of other cultures to position themselves within local and global contexts. People make meaning with stories. Writing about the way children take up popular cultural narratives of superheroes, Anne Haas Dyson notes, “Meanings do not come in any direct way from stories themselves;
meanings are constructed and reconstructed in the social world that takes up the story” (1997, p. 61). And so, whether stories are shared among peers, by a religious leader, a parent before bed, a teacher in the classroom, an oral story, a book marked as “fiction,” on the internet or in a textbook, the context influences the meaning a child will take from it.

**Myth in middle grade textbooks.**

While the vast majority of this study is devoted to early twenty-first century young adult and middle grade children’s novels, I want to acknowledge the way traditional myth is framed within children’s textbooks. When myth is a topic in language arts textbooks, there is usually a justification attached for including myths as subject matter in the introduction to the section or textbook. A middle grade textbook series that focuses solely on Greek myth, *Mythlopedia*, (Kelly, 2010) includes a section of examples on why myths are relevant in modern culture in its book, *What a Beast*:

References to Greek mythology are all around us.

- Ever heard of Nike brand athletic gear? Meet Nike, personification and goddess of victory.
- What would Valentine’s Day be without the god of love, Cupid—or Eros, as the ancient Greeks called him?
- Does *Apollo 13* ring a bell? The first crewed U.S. space missions were named for Apollo, the god of archery and prophecy.

Bottom line: References to ancient myths are everywhere, from science to pop
culture, and knowing them will help you understand more about the world we live in. (p. 12, emphasis present in text)

*Mythlopedia* focuses on Greek mythology’s influence upon popular culture to a higher degree than many other textbooks. It describes a number of allusions to ancient myth within popular culture, but does not dive deeper to explore why these allusions are meant to be empowering in a present-day setting.

The textbook series has also made an effort to share information about Greek mythology using modern technology, creating profile pages for the Greek gods on the social networking website, Facebook.com (2009). What does it do to the ways students engage with myth, knowing they can friend Apollo, Zeus or Hera on Facebook, see images of the gods and post comments on each of their Facebook walls?

As of late 2009, for the most part the profile pages are ignored by members of Facebook, Hera, Apollo and Athena only have approximately 35 friends each. Zeus has over sixty. Dionysus, the god of wine, and Hades, the god of the underworld, have yet to accept my friend requests.

Few people write on their walls. The people or person posing as the gods do write on one another’s walls, referencing myths (Figure 2).
Here the goddess Demeter, mother to Persephone, warns Zeus of her displeasure to allow Hades to take Persephone to the underworld for half of each year, referencing the conclusion of the traditional myth (Hamilton, 1969, p. 62-63). The Facebook wall becomes a space to present an adaptation of the traditional myth.

From time to time, a “mortal” friend does comment on a god’s profile wall about the way the god has influenced him or her (Figure 3):

Figure 2: Facebook Wall Conversation of the Gods of Mythlopedia (Facebook.com, 2009)
The gods’ common friend, Cheryl, is the most regular poster. Overall, this new, technologically savvy way of offering prayers to the gods goes unnoticed.

More popular is the effort to bring the Greek gods (as re-presented in Riordan’s Percy Jackson series) and the activities depicted as occurring at a location called Camp Half-Blood to life in the form of a real day-camp. In the Percy Jackson series, Camp Half-Blood, where the demigods are safe from monsters, is on Long Island, New York. The camp has been turned from a fictional sacred place within the story into an actual summer camp for fans of the series between the ages of nine and thirteen. The fictional camp is protected by the Golden Fleece (Riordan, 2006, p. 276), giving it sacred status. The real day camp is held in McKinney Falls State Park in Texas, blurring the lines among myth, fantasy and reality. Since the day-camp is held on a state park—land designated as special and separate—it remains a sacred place in the reader’s world as well (Figure 4).
Within the several summers that the camp has been held, the sessions have sold-out (Bookpeople & Bradfield, website, 2010). There have been no complaints about the nature of the camp even though acts, once sacred or fictional, are performed in reality and in jest.

Returning to traditional myth’s depiction within children’s textbooks, in contrast to Mythlopedia’s focus on popular culture, the Elements of Literature textbook series (Daniel, 2000) focuses on architecture and art for its justification of studying myth:

The ancient immortals are still around us in spirit. You might even pass
imitations of their “houses” almost every day. Whenever you see a large building with many columns holding up a roof, you are looking at an imitation of a Greek temple.

If you go to any one of the great museums of Europe or America, you will find statues and paintings of classical gods and heroes—as many as you will find of characters and events from history.

If you read poetry in English classes, you will come across references to such ancient places as Troy and Carthage. You will read references to such monsters as the Sirens and the Cyclops, to such gods and heroes as Poseidon, Odysseus (whose Roman name is Ulysses), Athena, and Hercules. These are all names from mythology—names that poets and artists expect us to recognize. (p. 496)

Here Daniel, the editor of the first course in *Elements of Literature*, focuses on students’ need to know myth to understand references made to myth in art, architecture and literature. Surely, there is more to the continuing prevalence of myth than architecture, imagery and name references.

**Myth and censorship.**

Donna R. White, who studies the influence of traditional Celtic myth in children’s literature, makes note of the multicultural uses for myth. She writes that, “the current interest in ethnicity and multiculturalism has created a new market for books based on cultural uniqueness, and authors often draw on the myths and legends of their cultural heritage to add symbolic significance to their works” (1998, p. 1). Despite this tendency
to incorporate myth—and not just that of the author’s own ancestry—into literature in various ways, White also notes the potential controversial nature of myth:

As an audience children stand in a peculiar position. Because of our attitudes toward children and childhood—strongly influenced by John Locke's philosophy, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idiotic educational theories, and the Romantic era's idealization of the child—writers approach this special readership much differently than they would an adult audience. Some concepts, situations, and events, we believe, are inappropriate for children, who lack certain kinds of knowledge and experience and who are (we hope) innocent and pure. Myth and legend and folktales are loaded with such inappropriate material, so they often undergo a sea of change before they are offered to children. (p. 2)

This questioning of folklore’s appropriateness for children has been pursued by other scholars as well. When discussing traditional myths and legends as “vehicles for moral teaching,” as they are often used, Eve Bearne (2000) notes some of the problems of using folklore for lessons in morality:

While these tales are very much part of the canon of ‘children’s literature’ they present some problems. In the first place they are not, at first, ‘literature’, but sprang from oral cultures. They were not told for children, but for adults (although no doubt some children might have been around at the time). And if they are meant to teach, their morality is sometimes highly ambiguous. This raises questions about whether these stories ought to be seen as ‘suitable’ for instructing children, particularly since neither morality nor traditional narratives themselves are stable; they both change according to cultural context. (p. 183)
Because the cultural significance of traditional myths may shift, the argument here is that they may be inappropriate for use with children. Although interpreting stories removed from their larger contexts or without discussion of ambiguities allows for the possibility of misinterpretation, I argue that by exploring myths in social settings and with a teacher who can provide contextual information about the culture of origin or acquisition or who can provide other story-versions for comparison, a reader is more likely to be able to explore and make meaning over points of ambiguity and develop their own stance on the moral implications of a story.

The heart of this debate over sharing traditional and re-presented myths with children is not necessarily one solely of age appropriateness or moral ambiguity. This association between traditional myth and religion has, as noted in the Introduction about Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials series (1995, 1997, 2000), on occasion been a source of conflict.

In the early 1980s a court battle between a family and the Tennessee Board of Education, known as Mozert v. Hawkins County Public Schools, brought the value of traditional mythology as well as other forms of literature used in schools into question:

The protesters also attacked classical mythology because it talks about false gods and because heroes like Ulysses and Hercules promote the humanistic belief that people can save themselves. More generally, they rejected all myths, legends, and folk tales, regardless of their source, for fear that children might start wondering whether the stories in the Bible are any more literally true than the tales of other cultures. (DelFattore, 1992, p. 54-55)

Whether or not students make this extrapolation to question popularly-held,
contemporary religious beliefs would be a study worth undertaking. For the purposes of this study I do count such religions as myth as I searched for modern-day re-presentations of the characters of myth in young adult and middle grade children’s novels.

It is also worth noting that the publisher of the textbooks questioned in the Mozert v. Hawkins County Public Schools case is Holt, Rinehart and Winston, the same company that published the *Elements of Literature* series two decades later. The Introductory Course of this series, by Daniel (2000), defines traditional myth in its introduction to “Our Classical Heritage” as:

> Stories that are always in some sense religious. Myths represent the deepest wishes and fears of human beings. They helped the ancient people to understand the mysterious and sometimes frightening forces of the universe—forces such as seasonal changes, fire, lightning, drought, floods, and death. Myths probably originated when people began to ask questions about the creation of the world and about their role in it. (p. 496)

The use of the term ‘ancient people’ and the word ‘probably’ demonstrate that the publisher and editor may be attempting to distance myth from religion in order to accommodate current religious beliefs. However, the fact that belief is acknowledged as a part of the definition of myth sets this textbook apart from the *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (1996) cited at the beginning of this chapter. Nonetheless, myths still serve these purposes of orienting people, even when they are not restricted to sharing traditional versions.
A common motif in most of the novels I analyzed for this study is the moment when the child or young adult protagonist learns that the gods of traditional myth actually do exist. While their reactions vary, this motif is accompanied by the component that myth is also defined for the protagonists, and by extension, the reader.

In Oh.My.Gods. (Childs, 2008), Phoebe initially has trouble accepting that the gods of myth exist. When told by her new stepfather, Damian, a Greek school headmaster, that the Greek gods are alive and are benefactors of the academy he runs, Phoebe quickly judges his mental state:

My first thought is, Damian is insane. Like crazy, nuts, messed-up-in-the-head insane. As if Greek gods really exist.

They are myth. Myth, as in the kind of stuff you read about in sophomore English with guys killing their dads and marrying their moms—ew, and I think my life is gross. As in, the kind of stuff you see Brad and Orlando duking it out over on the big screen—yum.

Not the kind of stuff the man my mom married fully believes in.

I look at Mom, ready to express my sympathies and assure her I am ready to head back to America and that we can sort the divorce out once we get there. But she’s not freaking out.

She’s nodding.

Sympathetically.

At me.
As if I’m the one who just found out my new husband is delusional.

That’s when I first know I’m in trouble. Mom [a therapist] is professionally trained in the art of delusional psychopaths. She told me once she never goes along with their fantasies—it only makes things worse—and if she’s staying calm then that means she believes him. Which means she believes the Greek gods exist, too.

And while I might doubt her judgment when it comes to major life changes like marriage and moving out of the country, Mom is usually completely sane when it comes to discerning reality from fantasy.

As if she can sense my shock, she reaches out and places a hand on my knee. “I know this is difficult to digest—”

“Difficult?” I shout. “Difficult? Algebra is difficult. The ironman [race] is difficult. *This* is insane.” (pp. 28-29, emphasis present in text)

While referencing the ways myth is used in education and is present in popular culture, Phoebe asserts that myth is not real, not something to be believed, but rather, is fantasy.

This initial reaction is common among the human protagonists of the young adult and middle grade novels that incorporate the gods or characters of myth into present-day settings and that comprise my sample. Phoebe is only forgetting to question if she or her step-father is dreaming or on drugs, another common aspect of this motif.

A few of the characters who witness acts of magic or speak to a character of myth also assume they are crazy. In Wendy Delsol’s *Stork* (2010), which is not a part of my sample since no gods are included, but rather Nordic traditions are explored, Kat Leblanc learns that a group of elderly women, The Storks, choose mothers for the souls of unborn
babies they dream about. Kat, narrates, “I was either going crazy or had just had an up-close-and-personal with a coven of witches or a gaggle of Stork ladies. Given a choice, I’d take crazy” (p. 19). When perceiving something that does not match her view of the world, rather than adjusting her understanding of the external world, she believes the problem is internal, that Kat’s own abilities to perceive and understand are at fault.

Returning to Childs’s *Oh.My.Gods.* (2008), the school Damian, Phoebe’s stepfather, runs is Plato’s Academy. He asks Phoebe if she has heard of it:

The big philosophy school where a bunch of old Greek guys got together to talk about intense stuff like the origin of life and what kind of poison worked best?

“Yeah.”

“Well,” Damian continues, “there is more to the Academy’s history than most textbooks contain. In the sixth century, the Roman emperor Justinian issued an edict demanding the Academy be closed and forbade formal philosophical education.

The…*ahem*…benefactors of the school were not prepared to see it closed so they moved it here. To Serfopoula.” (p. 26, emphasis present in text)

The school benefactors are the Greek gods and the present-day students are their descendants. But why would the gods support the school founded by the “great Demythologizer” (O’Flaherty, 1995)? Perhaps because *Oh.My.Gods.*, as many of the novels within this sample, may be perceived as another attempt to “remythologize” traditional gods.

Later, as Phoebe begins to settle into her life on the island and at the Academy, she contemplates the categorizations of myth and fairy tales (which traditionally would
fall under the “fokktale” heading of Table 5). Phoebe’s new friend, Troy, another student at the Academy and a descendant of Asklepios, the god of healing (p. 71), helps her differentiate between myth and fairy tale after discussing the origin of the Greek island, Serfopoula, where the Academy is located:

“So the island was built for watching the sun set?”

He shrugs. “It’s just a fairy tale. A bedtime story men made up to tell around the fire at night.”

…“Until a few days ago,” I return, “I thought you were a fairy tale.”

“There’s a difference. Myths and fairy tales aren’t the same thing.”

“Then explain it to me.”

Still gazing at the water, he says, “A myth is a tradition, a legend created to explain the unexplainable. The gods are unexplainable, hence they are myth.”

“And fairy tales?”

I watch his face closely, looking for a reaction. Finally, after several long seconds, he turns to look down at me. He meets my gaze head on, concentrating like he’s trying to figure me out. Good luck with that. Eventually his features relax and he smiles a little.

“A fairy tale,” he says, “is a story we wish were true.” (p. 135).

These definitions complicate the differences among myth and other story types. On the whole, the Oh.My.Gods. duology includes both mythic and fairy tale elements by way of the inclusion both of gods and of an “evil” step-sister figure, Stella, who serves as one of Phoebe’s several antagonists. Jack Zipes, a fairy tale scholar, notes that fairy tale and myths have historically shared motifs:
We do know that oral folk tales, which contain wondrous and marvelous elements, have existed for thousands of years and were told largely by adults for adults. Motifs from these tales, which were memorized and passed on by word of mouth, made their way in the Western world into the Bible and the Greek classics such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and the Greek and Roman myths. (2007, p. 2)

Since many European folktales and myths share common motifs, many conflicts, tensions and aspects of meaning will be similar among the various stories.

Similarly, in Maryrose Wood’s Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy (2007, 2008, 2009), in the second novel, *How I Found the Perfect Dress* (2008), the protagonist, Morgan, is living in Connecticut and is plagued by characters from Celtic lore interrupting her life. The distinctions among folktale, fairy tale, myth and legend all become conflated in a setting where goddesses, leprechauns, fairies and Santa Claus are all real. At the start of the novel, Morgan’s little sister, seven-year-old Tammy, asks her about Santa Claus:

“Is Santa Claus true or not?”

Dad gave me the evil eye, but I had no intention of being the Santa-killer either. Not if I wanted to survive junior year.

“Lots of things are true that people think are not,” I’d answered, not looking her in the eye. I was kind of the wrong person to ask at that point, though, after what happened to me last summer in Ireland. No biggie, just me riding a bike across the Irish countryside, finding out I was a legendary half-goddess, undoing a bunch of magical faery enchantments.” (pp. 4-5)

Tammy then insists that Morgan stay up on Christmas Eve to take a photo as Santa Claus
so Tammy will have proof that Santa Claus exists which she can share with the other kids at school. Morgan initially does not believe that Santa Claus is real and fails to stay awake to even try and take a picture of him, although she does spend Christmas Eve night sleeping on the living room couch. At the end of the novel she receives a photo taken that night, showing Santa Claus:

The second photo was—

Okay. Even I found this hard to believe.

The location was unmistakable. The photo was of my living room, in my house. There was my Christmas tree, with all the goofy ornaments Tammy and I had made over the years.

And there was Santa Claus: red suit, white beard, round belly, grinning and winking at the camera and sliding something under the tree.

In the background, but clearly visible in the photo: me, stretched out on the sofa, eyes closed, *The Magical Tales of Ireland* propped on my chest.

*Oh fek,* I thought. *Wait until Tammy sees this.* (p. 251, emphasis present in text)

The fact that Santa Claus is real in this young adult novel is relevant, because, depending upon personal experiences and her background, it may draw the Western reader’s attention to the folklore of her own culture and to the stories she believes or refuses to believe.

While Morgan has status as a “half-goddess” throughout the series and she interacts with humans, faeries, gnomes, leprechauns, unicorns and legendary Celtic heroes, there are also fairy tale elements in this series. Tammy loves fairy tale princesses to the point that her mother fears Tammy “wouldn’t grow up to be president now because
her plastic princess tiara was slowly turning her brain into glitter” (2008, p. 7). While Tammy dreams of being a princess, Morgan is the one who may have to wear a princess dress to the prom made especially for her by “Wee Folk Custom Tailors & Alterations” (p. 113), a magical tailoring company. When the saleswoman asks her what she thinks of the dress, Morgan has trouble knowing exactly what to say:

“It’s…indescribable.” If only it were. Imagine the kind of cheap, last-minute Cinderella costume you’d get a kid for Halloween at the drugstore. Puffy pink sleeves, layers of pink taffeta, bubblegum pink polyester bodice. It had, excuse me, bows around the waist, made of pink lace-edged ribbon and a whole lotta ugly.

“Really, my dear,” the saleswoman said proudly, “You are sure to be the absolute belle of the ball in a dress like this. Unless you’d prefer something more princessy?”

“No!” I was trying not to gag. “This is plenty princessy, thanks.” (p.113)

These comments in How I Found the Perfect Dress serve as critiques of princess culture and explores the way femininity is presented to young female characters.

The conflation of story types in the Oh.My.Gods duology and the Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy is interesting in light of the fact that other books in this study often avoid calling the stories of the gods “myth.” In the Percy Jackson series (Riordan, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), while the ancient Greek myths often serve as inspiration, dreams and guides for how to battle monsters, the narratives that are understood to be the traditional Greek myths are rarely called myths. Rather, characters refer to them as “stories,” “old stories,” or as “back in the old days,” etc. (2008a, pp. 46,
This encourages the reader to think of those narratives as a part of the reality within the Percy Jackson series instead of being limited to a foreign world and time. This also avoids a limiting definition of myth and allows present-day readers to take in seemingly ordinary children interacting with the gods as experiences that do not have to belong to a setting of long ago or of a world unlike the reader’s own.

In Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* (2005), the first novel of the Percy Jackson series, the protagonist, Percy, begins as a seemingly ordinary boy, with relatively ordinary problems. He deals with a classmate who bullies him. He has trouble paying attention in class and understanding words as he reads. But Percy soon learns that Greek gods, goddesses and mythic creatures and monsters actually exist and that he is a son of one of those gods. The same occurs with Phoebe in *Oh.My.Gods.* (Childs, 2008). She goes from being a Californian high school runner with plans to attend college locally to being transferred to a school for descendants of the Greek gods where most of her classmates discriminate against her for being completely human. (She later learns she is the descendant of Nike and is much more powerful than most of her classmates.) Morgan in *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* (Wood, 2007) is a seemingly normal teenage girl trying to recover from a bad break-up when she travels to “Long-ago Wheneverville” (p. 115) to help keep order among the people and creatures of myth only to have some of them follow her back home into the modern time and to her home in Connecticut.

Stories like these bring the characters of myth to life in a familiar time and world, helping to potentially redefine myth and peoples’ relationships with the gods. Already I have shown that within my sample, myth and other story-types are conflated and that myth gains significance beyond those dimensions commonly listed in descriptions in
language arts textbooks. For the purposes of the remainder of this study, when I refer to Classical or ancient myths often shared as retellings, I will write of them as being *traditional myth*. When I write of *myth* in the present-day sense, I will mean stories like the ones comprising my sample, in which gods, the creatures of myth—such as the Medusa, Minotaur, fairies, heroes or other people or other beings that are intentionally elevated to the status of gods—and humans meet. The characters, mortals and deities, are in a space to dialogue in a world the readers will find familiar. Whether these stories are ascribed as inspiration, truth, lies, beliefs, entertainment, reality, fantasy, the past or the present and what they can tell readers about themselves as writers, readers and members of cultures will be discussed throughout the remainder of this study.
Chapter Two: Myth in young adult and middle grade children’s novels

Cupid

Psyche in a Dress

Troy High

“'It’s very curious,' Hulda said, ‘the way so much that is held as myth or children’s stories are common themes found throughout cultures of the world’”

~Hulda to Kat
Wendy Delsol, Stork, 2010, p. 276

The characters of myth should feel at home in both adult and children’s literature. Aside from retellings, they have been mentioned, alluded to or have made guest appearances in novels for centuries. Critic and scholar Northrop Frye has noted, that “because myth is and has always been an integral element of literature, the interest of poets in myth and mythology [has] been remarkable and constant since Homer’s time” (1963, p. 21). Even with this constant presence, a specific trend that is worthy of study has been the way in which folktales, legends and myths have been re-presented, reinterpreted, retold, etc. for a young audience. Award-winning children’s author and scholar, Gary Schmidt (2005) notes, “The ways in which a story is adapted will say a great deal about that reteller’s and perhaps that culture’s sense of the uses of history, the uses of story, and the needs and nature of its child audience” (p. 277). This is true for the
adaptations of myth in the young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample. Traditional myth is also often cited as a source for images, conflicts and creatures incorporated into fantasy narratives. Karen Egoff writes, “Many modern fantasists have made use of the “matter” of myth, legend and folklore. They have also used the structural patterns of the imagination found in the oral tradition” (1988, p. 5). Adaptations of myths and its characters explore or give insights into the trends, concerns or questions circulating in culture and also root the stories in past traditions.

Before I focus on the specific ways and realms that the gods and creatures of myth inhabit the familiar worlds within the young adult and children’s novels I analyzed, I think it best to explore some of the other studies done on myth and its creatures in literature and the various categories and realms myth has been relegated to inhabiting. To illustrate some of these categories, I draw upon recent young adult novels as examples of these other researchers’ categories, but most of these novels are outside the official scope of my sampled literature. The focus of this chapter is to summarize some of these previous studies and to establish the vocabulary I use to describe my sample.

The Reader’s Need to Be Familiar with Traditional Myth

When the gods and creatures of traditional myth are referenced in literature, the readers are expected to understand the allusions because they are assumed to be a part of their cultural knowledge. Debra A. Moddelmog (1993) notes that allusions are often the source for readers to historically learn of myths. She writes:

The first way readers can become aware of a myth is when the text (or, if one
prefers, the author) briefly alludes to it. This kind of reference is like a signal; it tells us nothing—or very little—about the myth but merely hints that we might find additional evidence of it elsewhere in the story. At one time in the history of the prose narrative such a citation did not imply that the myth would reappear. Before the twentieth century, writers frequently used myth to high-light their themes. (p. 17, emphasis present in text)

Without previous knowledge of the myth referenced, the reader may not be able to decipher the meaning of the allusion or the way it impacts the theme or meaning of the novel. This expectation of previous knowledge may become a point of tension for the reader if she has not been shown or has not heard or read of the referenced myths previously.

Having knowledge of traditional myth can be marked or privileged knowledge, indicating a reader’s socioeconomic status or education. When writing about Greek myths, Dyson notes, “These stories, however, are cultural classics, associated with the educated elite, not with the masses, and taught through the written word (despite their oral origins), not through the television or movie screen” (p. 115). I have no doubt that Dyson would agree that Greek myths have made their way back onto screen with movies like Troy (Peterson, 2004), Clash of the Titans (Harryhausen & Davis, 1981; Fay & Leterrier, 2010) and The Lightning Thief (Hammel & Columbus, 2010), an adaptation of the first novel in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series, fuelling more people to have a knowledge of some myths.

Esther Friesner’s young adult novel, Temping Fate (2006) touches on the role different media have in transmitting the stories of traditional myth to young followers of
the mass media. In the novel, Ilana Newhouse has obtained a summer job at a temp agency that places teenage workers to assist the gods and other characters of myth in their tasks. Ilana, who is working for the three fates, meets two of the other temps, Joanna and Max, at a coffeehouse to discuss her first day of work. Ilana mentions that she was already familiar with Greek mythology before beginning her job. Max attempts to tell a joke to Ilana about how the goddess Persephone is married to the “Lord of the Underworld”:

Max leaned over and whispered in Ilana’s ear, “Ask her [Joanna] why a goddess married a mob boss.”

“Nice try,” Ilana whispered back. “I know what ‘Underworld’ means. Persephone’s the queen of the dead.”

“You knew that?” Max raised an eyebrow. “How?”

“When I was little, my sister [Dyllin] gave me a big book about the Greek myths. She used to read it to me until I got old enough to read it to myself.” Ilana’s voice turned wistful as she remembered those times when every conversation with Dyllin didn’t end in a fight. “I liked the stories, so I kept reading more.”

“Oh.” Max looked disappointed that his attempted joke had fallen flat.

“Better luck next time.” Joanna laughed. “He always pulls that one on the newbies. Unlike you, Max, some of us actually read mythology before coming to work for D.R. Temps.”

“I read mythology!” Max objected. Then, sheepishly, he added, “Now.”

“Well, that’s an improvement,” Joanna said. “I heard that when you were a newbie, everything you knew about the gods came from reruns of Xena, Hercules,
“Hey, what’s wrong with sword-and-sandal flicks?” Ilana spoke up. “Jason and the Argonauts is a classic!” (p. 69, emphasis present in text)

Movies and television shows have become a common way to transmit full-adaptations of traditional myth.

**A full-adaptation: The Troy High example.**

Homer’s *Iliad* (1950) has been adapted numerous times and in numerous ways. The original poem of the Trojan War was shared orally and its story is strongly influenced by “preexisting traditions of myth, both the Greeks’ own traditions and other peoples’ with whom they had contact” (Louden, 2006, p. 5). It is not the “history of Troy or of the Trojan War but the story of an individual,” the warrior Achilles (Latacz, 2007, p. 27).

The *Iliad* (1950) has been modernized for young adult readers in Shana Norris’s contemporary realistic *Troy High* (2010). The poem is re-imagined as a rivalry between two high schools that intensifies after school redistricting and the Lacede High cheerleader, Elena Argos, must transfer to Troy High. Elena is a re-imagining of Helen of Troy, who traditionally, as “the face that launched a thousand ships,” was the wife of Menelaus and was stolen away by Paris, one of the princes of Troy, sparking the Trojan War in myth and in the *Iliad* (Ovid, 2004, 694). In *Troy High* (2010), Elena begins dating Perry Prince (Paris in the *Iliad*) before breaking up with her previous boyfriend, Lucas Mennon (Menelaus in the *Iliad*). The novel is told from the perspective of Cassie
Prince, who like the seer Cassandra in the original oral epic, foresees tragedy for her brother, Hunter (or Hector in the *Iliad*), who had hoped to end the rivalry forever.

While in the *Iliad*, Achilles is the central character (Latacz, 2007, p. 27; Scherer, 1963, p. 57), *Troy High*’s narrator Cassie Prince is probably a more relatable figure for potential teenage and particularly female readers. After Cassie helps Elena begin a relationship with her older brother Perry, Elena breaks-up with her Lacede boyfriend, Lucas Mennon, during the half-time break of a football game that his team then loses. Greg, Lucas’s brother, suggests Elena and Lucas wait to discuss the end of their relationship until later. Cassie also rebukes Elena for her bad choice in timing:

She had to do this *now*, when Lucas had to put his focus on the game?

“Elena,” I said, “I think Greg is right. Don’t make any decisions now that you’ll regret tomorrow. Wait until you both can sit down in private and talk. Lucas has other things on his mind right now—”

“I’m not making any decision I’ll regret. I’ve made up my mind, and it’s final.”

(p. 57, emphasis present in text)

Hurt by the way Elena ends their relationship, Lucas triggers an escalating series of pranks among the students of the two high schools.

The Greek gods have almost no place in the story of *Troy High* the way they did in the original poem; taking sides in the war. One of the few allusions to their presence is on the walls of the Troy High cafeteria. Cassie describes the murals on the cafeteria walls that feature them, narrating, “The Troy High cafeteria was actually really nice. Murals painted on the walls showed Trojan warriors riding to battle, their swords held high, with gods and goddesses watching from the clouds above them” (pp. 22-23). While
implying the history of the role of the gods in the affairs of men within the original story of the *Iliad*, this mural also implies that the gods have a different position in *Troy High*. Instead of interacting with mortal characters, they are kept at a distance, above them, only to observe the events that occur in the mortal world (assuming they exist in the reality of this novel at all). Cassie continues to narrate:

> I followed Elena as she wound through the tables toward the back of the room. In front of the mural showing Paris, the prince of Troy, giving the golden apple to the goddess Aphrodite, sat a table occupied by two cheerleaders, Kelsey and Mallory. (p. 24)

This mural alludes to the myth of the golden apple in which Paris had to choose the most beautiful goddess among Aphrodite, Athena and Hera (Hamilton, 1969, p. 256-259). Instead of providing an argument about the present-day position of the Greek gods in the affairs of the students of Troy High, the allusion could serve to show how Kelsey, Mallory and Elena are considered the most beautiful and popular girls in Troy High and to foreshadow how Perry, the Paris character, will choose among them.

Similar to her namesake Cassandra, the character Cassie foresees possible ruin for her brother, Hunter who is the re-presentation of Hector, the eldest prince of Troy, who traditionally dies at the hands of Achilles. She narrates:

> This war wouldn’t end soon; I could feel that deep in my gut.

> During the short time I did manage to sleep, I dreamed about Hunter. I saw him on the football field, dodging around other players who were coming after him. I couldn’t tell what school the players were from because they were dressed all in black. In my dream, one of the enemy players suddenly grew huge and ran full
speed at Hunter. The player rammed my brother hard, sending him spinning into
the air, where he stayed suspended for what felt like hours. Suddenly, Hunter fell,
crashing hard into the ground on his neck and shoulder.

Then my brother lay there, not moving at all.

I awoke sweating and panting heavily, as if I’d been the one running from the
football players. My stomach churned and I couldn’t get rid of the feeling that my
dream had been a sort of warning. (pp. 101-102)

Cassie’s forewarning comes in the form of a dream. This is arguably the only potentially
mythic or supernatural element to the story, but this could also be seen as a realistic
element to many readers, depending upon their background and beliefs. In this way, an
epic poem, once associated with the gods taking sides in the affairs of men, is
transformed fully into present-day realistic fiction, allowing readers to see the tension of
the epic in tangible and relatable ways as teenage characters struggle with romances,
popularity and a mounting school rivalry.

**An incomplete or ‘puzzle piece’ adaptation: The *Psyche in a Dress* example.**

Whether watching the movie *Troy* (Peterson, 2004) or reading *Troy High* (Norris,
2010), modern-day readers are exposed to elements of the ancient poem and of myths. In
some cases the adaptations are complete and are set in the past or modernized as
previously discussed and some times just bits and pieces of a myth are acquired, as
though they are puzzle pieces being used to fit into a different puzzle picture to add color,
meaning or depth.
This occurs with Francesca Lia Block’s young adult novel in verse, *Psyche in a Dress* (2006). A seventeen-year-old actress, Psyche, seeks her first lost love, an unknown boy, who had visited her at night in her bedroom. She feels she must be punished for betraying his trust and trying to see him in the light. She experiences several romances, one of which is abusive, to punish herself, recover from her insecurities and find her lost love. Throughout the realistic novel in verse there are many allusions to traditional Greek myth and almost all of the modern characters are given the names of characters from traditional Greek myth to indicate their relationships with and positions in relation to Psyche as she tries on the different identities of various women and goddesses from myth and works through her insecurities and problems. As an example, a grown Psyche explains her experiences to her daughter, Joy, near the end of the novel:

I have been young too

I have been Psyche, I have been Echo

I have been Eurydice

I have been Persephone, like you

I thought I was not a goddess

My mother was a goddess

Now I am Demeter, like my mother

Because of you

My Demeter tried to save me from Hades

That man you have is Eros too

I let my Eros, your father, leave
because I didn’t think I was enough
But you must remember you are everything
We all are

_Psyche_ means soul
What more is there than that?
Echo never stops her singing
Maybe it was Eurydice’s choice to fade away
when Orpheus looked back
so she did not have to return with him
Persephone is a goddess of the bridge between
light and dark, day and night, death and life (pp. 112-113, emphasis present in text)

These pieces of various traditional myths form a complex picture of Psyche’s experiences with love and her relationships with men that parallel the women of myths’ experiences. The protagonist moves from positions of powerlessness to ones that are powerful. As Psyche becomes empowered as she raises her daughter Joy, she finds aspects of the female characters of Greek myth that are also empowering, providing feminist interpretations to traditional myth.

Whether complete or pieces of a larger picture, straight-forward retellings or reimaginings of myth, scholars such as Karen Patricia Smith, C.W. Sullivan III, and Eric J. Ziolkowski have categorized some of the ways myth as been appropriated in literature for adults and children.
Review of the Literature: Categorizing myth in literature

A number of studies have been conducted in recent years exploring the ways authors use myth in literature. The general trend in these studies is to construct categories of the ways myth is present or is used within a work of literature. Some of the studies only examine a certain genre, most only look at novels that adapt stories from one specific culture’s folk traditions. None of the studies I examined proposed a category or exact approach to the type of young adult and middle grade children’s novels I chose to comprise my sample and to examine for this study.

Previous categories constructed.

Overall, research into the use of myth in literature is not extensive. In one study, C.W. Sullivan III (1989) defines three ways in which modern fantasy is influenced by Celtic myths and legends. He created the categories “expanding,” “interweaving,” and “inventing.” Sullivan described “Expanding”:

An author who uses the plot of a mythic or legendary narrative as a framework for his or her fiction is employing a basic method for turning myth or legend into poetry, drama, or prose. In such a situation, the plot, characters, setting, and the like are the same in both the ancient myth or legend and the more modern short story or novel. The modern author, then, expands upon the original material—adding, as it were, flesh to the skeleton—thus transforming what might appear as a ten-page story in a mythological text into a novel of two hundred pages or
more. The modern author adds detail and texture, filling in the background, developing major and minor characters more fully, borrowing from other compatible sources, and creating new material that complements the original. (p. 13)

An example of such an expansion in children’s literature is Julius Lester’s young adult novel *Cupid* (2007). Within the 192-page retelling of the traditional myth of Cupid and Psyche’s romance, in which the god steals away the beautiful human, Psyche, so that he could join her each night without revealing his face or true identity, Lester uses a strongly-voiced narrator. Lester describes his inspiration for the narrator as originating from the voice of “a southern black storyteller” (Author’s Note, p. 193). Within the story itself, Lester’s narrator treats the story as though it is a living character and draws attention to the fact that he is filling what he considers to be “gaps in the story” (Author’s Note, p. 194) and expanding upon the myth of Cupid and Psyche to incorporate some of the critiques of the myth that arise when Psyche tries to learn the identity of her lover and shines a light upon him:

Now, I’m going to have to put the story on pause because I know you have a question, and I know what the question in. Because Cupid had wings growing out of his shoulders, and Psyche had been hugging him every night, why hadn’t she felt his wings? Why did she find out he had wings only after she looked at him in the light from the lamp?

I had the same question, and I asked the story about it. The story scratched its head and looked very confused. A story hates to be wrong, but it finally had to admit that it did not know why Psyche had never felt Cupid’s wings.
The only reason I could come up with was that Psyche’s arms were short and they could only reach around Cupid’s neck. The story liked that and gave me a high five. However, if that explanation doesn’t work for you—well, you should come up with another one and put it in the story.

Stories don’t like to admit when they need help, but I know from experience that when you give it to them, they are very grateful. I have saved a whole lot of stories from oblivion. (p. 117)

In *Cupid*, not only is the myth of Cupid and Psyche expanded upon, meeting Sullivan’s categorization, but Lester also adds the unique voice of the narrator, which can be seen as an added “texture” to the story. The narrator encourages the reader to participate in adapting the story, expanding it further.

Sullivan goes on to describe his second category, “Interweaving,” which weaves multiple narratives together:

A second way to use myth or legend in fiction, poetry, or drama is to select materials from a tale or from a group of complementary tales and then weave these materials together into a cohesive whole. A good writer will generally select his or her materials from stories within one culture's store of myths and legends so that the spirit of or cultural worldview behind the final product retains its integrity. Such a writer will often include not only major characters and episodes from myths and legends, but will also include local folk beliefs and attitudes known to exist, or to have existed, among those people within whose culture the myths and legends developed. (1989, p. 35)

Sullivan restricts the weaving together of myths to one culture, using the value-judgment
that “a good writer” will research and incorporate aspects of the culture that originated
the story. Although this restriction makes sense to have an author explore the history of a
character of myth, it discounts the contemporary way people from different cultures
interact and the way stories may be adapted to represent a more global or multicultural
interpretation of myth and experience.

In comparison to Julius Lester’s young adult novel Cupid (2007), which is an
expansion considering the variations of one myth, Stephanie Spinner’s young adult novel
Quicksilver (2005) shares numerous experiences of the Greek messenger god, Hermes.
The novel interweaves multiple Greek myths, including some that did not originally
feature Hermes prominently. Spinner constructs the messenger god’s story, interweaving
the many accounts of the god to show a complete characterization of him. In her author’s
note Spinner writes:

As for what I imagined and what I didn’t, readers of Greek mythology probably
know the myth in which the infant Hermes steals Apollo’s cattle—it’s the only
one in which he takes center stage. They may have noticed him in all the many
versions of the myth of Demeter and Kore/Persephone, the myth of Perseus and
Medusa, and the myth called the judgment of Paris where his role is much
smaller. Mythology zealots will also know the myth about Zeus and Io, in which
Hermes kills Argos at Zeus’ command.

I based two episodes of Quicksilver on Homer: Priam’s visit to Achilles’ tent in
The Iliad and Calypso’s release of Odysseus in The Odyssey. (p. 229, emphasis
present in text)

Spinner explicitly shares the sources she used to develop the plot of her young adult
novel and interweaves aspects of all of those myths to share a unified story to show Hermes’s complicated relationship with his father, Zeus, and his negative stance on the Trojan War (p. 182-183).

Sullivan’s final category is “Inventing,” which involves more license on the part of the children’s author:

The young people, or children, who are the main characters in each series [The Dark is Rising by Susan Cooper and The Chronicles of Prydain by Lloyd Alexander] come primarily from the author’s own imagination, and the plot, while it certainly derives its basic pattern from the traditional magic tale or heroic quest, is also an invention of the author. These inventions are then supported or rounded out by a great deal of material drawn largely from the mythology, folklore, and culture of [in Sullivan's study] the Celtic peoples.

Although it is possible to recognize the Celtic influence much more than any other, it is also necessary to recognize the influence of the more universal mythic and ritualistic patterns which appear in the stories of many cultures, ancient and modern. (1989, p. 55)

This type of mythic influence of drawing upon the characterizations, themes and plots of myth is widespread and often serves as the inspiration for many fantasy stories. For example, Stephanie Meyer’s Twilight saga (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) may be interpreted as an invention based upon the myth of Cupid and Psyche. In both stories a mortal girl falls in love with a rich and powerful immortal man, but is not originally aware of his true identity or power. After being separated from her immortal lover against her will, the girl must withstand trials before having her immortal lover restored to her. She then becomes
both a mother and immortal.

Turning to another scholar, Eric J. Ziolkowski (1996) completed a study expounding six ways in which literature intended for all ages may be studied in terms of its relationship to myth. In summary, his six ways involve (1) Analyzing the original myth and assessing how a work of literature adapts it, (2) Tracing how specific prefigurative mythic materials are received and adapted, (3) Examining how plot structures are explicitly or implicitly adopted from a myth, (4) Outlining the universal aspect or archetypes present that are supposed to be derived from a collective unconscious, (5) Authors, readers or critics proclaiming a work of literature to “embody newly created myths” (p. 255), and (6) Having a character or characters within the work of literature explicitly discuss the nature of myth.

It is important to note that, in contrast to Sullivan’s research, Ziolkowski’s categories, in part, rely on the reader or researcher to examine a text and make judgments to apply these categories to the work instead of the categories being an inherent aspect of the content or form of the story. This is particularly true in the case of people proclaiming a work to embody a new myth. Since this fifth category is dependent upon peoples’ responses to the literature, these factors would make Ziolkowski’s categories difficult to apply for the purpose of this study. (Although, later in this study I will assert that some young adult and middle grade children’s novels are creating new myths.) Plus, Ziolkowski’s categorizations do not explore the realms of myth’s use within literature—whether it is solely within the mythic time and place, in a world recognizable to the reader and whether it is presented as fantasy or reality, all aspects I wanted to examine.

Karen Patricia Smith, who is interested in fantasy and particularly its history
within Great Britain, writes about the inclusion of characters of myth within fantasy literature as a unique occurrence:

The appearance of mythological figures in diversionary fantasy may also be regarded as a unique contribution. The term “mythological figures” refers to specifically identifiable figures from classical, northern, Celtic or other mythic sources. Their appearance reflects a greater interest in the multicultural heritage of the British nation. (1993, p. 223)

Smith focuses on the way these characters of myth can represent a multicultural heritage. Literature published in the United States may serve the same function. In Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel American Born Chinese (2006), for example, the monkey king, a deity from traditional Chinese mythology, disguises himself as a literal stereotype of a Chinese-American and poses as Wei-Chen, the cousin of the protagonist, Jin Wang. Jin is embarrassed by Wei-Chen until the deity reveals his true form, sharing his own past struggles with trying to become something he was not, retelling his traditional myth. This Printz Award winning, young adult, graphic novel can encourage the reader to ruminate on the ways cultural heritage may be maintained or adapted while living in another culture, that of white middle class America. While retelling the story of the Monkey King and drawing upon its modern significance, the graphic novel also presents a multicultural American experience.

Mythic figures.

As quoted previously, Smith uses the term “mythological figures,” to describe the
gods and creatures of myth. For my own study, I use *Mythic Figures*. By this I mean those characters from traditional myths or history, which are included in recently published literature as deities or figures of power within a modern realistic setting. Such characters tend to be aware of their historical and cultural significance and draw upon the traditional narratives within the modern story. In the sample of children’s novels I analyzed, these mythic figures are presented as characters and their status as deities or figures of myth or history is acknowledged within the stories. They also interact with present-day human characters in various ways.

The term “Mythic Figures” has been used previously by James Hillman (2007, p. 9). His focus, however, is on applying the term to mythic archetypes within psychology. Hillman draws upon the works of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, among others, to understand the gods and mortals of myth and modern people within ordinary experiences. In the introduction, Joanne H. Stroud, writes of his work, “we have no myths as such—instead, [we have] depth psychology and psychopathology” (2007, p. 9) to imply that myths are a way to understand the human mind and to look within a person. While this may be one realm of myth, I am using the term *mythic figures* to look outside the reader and at the ways myth may be positioned as real, fantasy or religion; and how it is used to engage readers in recently published twenty-first century young adult and middle grade children’s novels.

An example of what I mean by *mythic figure* may be found in *The Lightning Thief* (2005), the first novel in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series. Twelve-year-old Percy has learned that the gods and creatures of Greek myth exist and has sought safety at Camp Half-Blood, a home for the demigods, or children of the gods. He speaks with the
As they talk, Percy realizes Mr. D, who is “a pudgy little man in a tiger-print Hawaiian shirt” (p. 65) and who wants to drink wine, is actually a mythic figure, the god Dionysus:

“My father is Zeus, of course.”

I ran through D names from Greek mythology. Wine. The skin of a tiger. The satyrs that all seemed to work here. The way Grover [a satyr] cringed, as if Mr. D were his master.


Mr. D rolled his eyes. “What do they say, these days, Grover? Do the children say, ‘Well, duh!’?”

“Yes, Mr. D.”

“Then, well, duh! Percy Jackson. Did you think I was Aphrodite, perhaps?”

“You’re a god.”

“Yes, child.”

“A god. You.”

He turned to look at me straight on, and I saw a kind of purplish fire in his eyes, a hint that this whiny, plump little man was only showing me the tiniest bit of his true nature. I saw visions of grape vines choking unbelievers to death, drunken warriors insane with battle lust, sailors screaming as their hands turned to flippers, their faces elongating into dolphin snouts. I knew that if I pushed him, Mr. D would show me worse things. (pp. 70-71)

As Percy realizes that another character, who initially seems like a normal man, is actually a Greek god, the reader is positioned with Percy for this discovery, seeing a
small bit of the history and traditional characterization of the god, Dionysus. The deity is presented draws upon that history and position of power to provide the character with a sense of being dangerous.

**Inclusion and re-presentations.**

When I originally read through Sullivan’s study (1989) of Welsh Celtic myth in fantasy and through Ziolkowski’s exploration (1996) of the six relationships among myth and literature, I kept in mind the type of literature I wanted to examine. I was discouraged to find that fantasy and realistic novels that incorporated mythic figures in a setting that is similar to a present-day young reader’s own modern world did not fit perfectly into Sullivan’s “expanding,” “interweaving” or “inventing” categories.

In terms of Ziolkowski’s study, my concept of mythic figures seems to overlap with three of his explanations of how literature and myth relate. They are the second, third and sixth methods he suggests. Ziolkowski describes one method is to “concentrate on tracing ways prefigurative mythic materials are received and adapted in the work of later authors, whether directly or by transformation, and whether consciously or unconsciously on the authors’ part” (p. 252). Another is that “the plot structure, as distinct from the narrative materials employed in it, may be found to be adopted implicitly or explicitly from a particular myth or legend” (p. 253). The use of specific characters from myth falls into this category. The mythic figures present in the young adult and middle grade children’s novels in my sample are aware of their mythic status. Because of this, they also incorporate Ziolkowski’s sixth relationship between myth and
literature, in which “the concept or phenomenon of myth [is] an explicit subject for
discussion” (p. 257). I looked at specific instances of the gods and creatures of
traditional myth or historic people being consciously incorporated into children’s novels
and examining the significance given to those characters. The resulting analysis informs
my chapters on myth’s implications in the realms of ideology (Chapter Five), interactions
or relationships with mythic figures of other cultures (Chapter Six) and interactions with
human, or as they were referred to in most of the novels, mortals (Chapter Seven).

Following Ziolkowski’s categories, the characters’ awareness and discussions of
myth and the mythic figures’ historical weight are often key aspects in the novels I
explored. Many fantasy novels use mythic figures: Three-headed dogs, medusas,
cyclopes, golems, fairies, etc. without accommodating their places or significances within
a larger mythical system and history of belief. For my purposes, I needed this history to
be acknowledged, I needed some assertion that myth survived, that these figures were re-
presentations of myth, not just staples of fantasy literature.

The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series by Michael Scott (2007, 2008,
2009, 2010), beginning with The Alchemyst (2007), stands in this murky space between
being a series that includes characters and creatures of myth that the fantasy genre has
acquired and acknowledging their mythological value. The series, which interweaves
magic, ancient and modern sciences and history, presents the gods of all mythologies as
belonging to a species of beings, the Elder Race, that once walked the Earth with
humanity. In The Alchemyst, the protagonists, fifteen-year-old twins Sophie and Josh
Newman, discuss this species with one of its members, Scathach, or Scatty, who refers to
human mortals as “humani”:
“I am not of the race of humani. My people were of different stock, the Elder Race. We ruled this earth before the creatures who became humani climbed down from the trees. Nowadays, we are remembered in the myths of just about every race. We are the creatures of legend, the Were clans, the Vampire, the Giants, the Dragons, the Monsters. In stories we are remembered as the Old Ones or the Elder Race. Some stories call us gods.”

“Were you ever a god?” Sophie whispered.

Scatty giggled. “No. I was never a god. But some of my people allowed themselves to be worshipped as gods. Others simply became gods as humani told tales of their adventures.” She shrugged. “We were just another race, an older race than man, with different gifts, different skills.” (p. 81)

Can all the gods, the elder species that allowed themselves to be worshipped, still qualify as mythic figures within my study? Scott is certainly dealing with myth and mythic figures and is certainly presenting them in a modern time and in a realistic setting. (Much of the series is set in San Francisco, Alcatraz Island, Paris and London). But at the same time, the gods are no longer themselves. They are a new race of being, part of a new universal monomyth that Scott is creating. Although I certainly believe that new myths and gods are always being produced and should be recognized in my study and although I had every plan to refer to The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series throughout my study, should it be an official part of my sample?

My dilemma over whether to include The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series in my sample led me to the conclusion that I needed my sample of literature to deal not only with these mythic figures and to acknowledge their history within the
human world, but to also let the creatures be the creatures they have always been, to let the gods be gods. I did not want to focus on books that explained the gods as being something other than gods, that turned them into some other creature. Such explorations are outside my purposes within this study. Instead, I am examining mythic figures, the ways they are included into a modern time and realistic places, the ways they and the themes and tensions that accompany them are re-presented, meaning their history as myth is accommodated and explored, not abolished.

This language of inclusion and re-presentation is the basis for how I understood and categorized the literature within my sample and distinguished it from the novels that do different, but nonetheless important work, retelling or adapting of myth and its characters. Admittedly, these categories are fallible constructions of my own making, but they served their purpose in helping me limit my study to 40 novels, instead of having to consider every children’s novel that included fairies, angels, demons, etc. that was written within the six-year span of my sample.

Inclusion is a hybrid of Sullivan’s “interweaving” and “inventing” categories. It involves an author taking a present-day setting, creating original characters and then incorporating mythic figures, such as the Greek gods, Egyptian gods, or famous people from history as characters who share dialogue, interact in other ways with the modern characters, and influence the plot. These mythic figures and other characters draw upon the mythic figures’ positions in traditional myth or history to give weight or add modern significance to the novel. These mythic figures are not mere allusions or references to ancient myth, but rather are constructed characters with descriptions, dialogue and back-stories (which incorporates information from myth or history).
Some of the terms used to describe the characters of myth re-presented in recently published novels include “Classical Representations in Popular Culture” (Southwest/Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association, 2010) or “cultural symbols” (Dyson, 1998, p. 17). Although I like how short “cultural symbols” is, the term does not incorporate the sense of the mythic that I would like to create when discussing these characters. “Classical Representation in Popular Culture,” in contrast, does strike at the mythic meaning, but it is a bulky phrase to repeat often. The same problem exists for “characters of myth represented…”

Instead I have used my own term to best describe the characters from myth who are acquired and presented in early twenty-first century literature. As noted earlier in this chapter, I call them Mythic Figures. These characters are included in modern settings and take on present-day significance in terms of mortal characters’ relationships to the gods, cultures and countries presented.

Also, when discussing the characters, motifs, themes and aspects of the novels that are included and adapted into my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, I prefer to use the term re-presented over adapted, incorporated, shown, etc. I have found re-presentation accommodates the history of these mythic figures’ inclusion to the recently published middle grade and young adult novels. The term is more freeing than to write that an Ancient, Classical or—as I prefer, traditional—story has been adapted or retold, because that is not usually the case with my sample of literature. Rather, with re-presentations the themes, conflicts or characters are re-imagined to the author, culture and reader’s will.

I offer the inclusion and the re-presentation of mythic figures, not as a challenge
to categories created by others, but as a way to best describe how myth is specifically incorporated within this sample of 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels published between 2005 and 2010 that include gods in present-day realistic settings.

(Table 6)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions of Terms</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mythic Figures</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Re-Presentation</strong></td>
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Table 6: Definitions of Terms

The ways mythic figures are included in these children’s novels are varied and challenge the ways myth has historically been positioned, expanding its realms in terms of its use of time and space; its designations within fantasy and reality; and in terms of its accessibility among readers of varied backgrounds and cultures.
Chapter Three: A mythic time and a mythic place

American Born Chinese  Thief Eyes
Guardian of the Dead  Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy
Percy Jackson series

“Remember: Even with the veil, humans never wholly forget the magic realm. The truth of our world will still be known to you, in the way it has always been known: in stories and dreams, in art and the imagination and in the wonder of childhood”

~Epona the Unicorn

As described in Chapter One, myths, particularly origin myths, are traditionally understood to be set in the world of a creation or a remote past, in a time and place unfamiliar from the one the myth teller and recipient know (Bascom, 1984; Calame, 2003). The summative chart of how myth is generally differentiated among legends and folktales that was incorporated into the first chapter when I explored the folkloric definition of myth may be helpful (Table 7):
**Table 7: Folklore Categories**

(Adapted from Calame, 2003, p. 9)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Principal Characters</th>
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<td>Fact</td>
<td>Remote Past</td>
<td>Other/Earlier World</td>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Nonhuman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Recent Past</td>
<td>Current World</td>
<td>Secular or Sacred</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folktale</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>Any Time</td>
<td>Any Place</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Human or Nonhuman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historically, myth was thought to be believed, but set in a remote past and in an earlier or other world, different from the one the reader or listener would recognize. When I think of this idea of the formative time and other world of myth, I usually imagine either wastelands or paradises, depending upon the language of the individual myth. Both of these places can be imaginings of the world during the time of creation, when the world and its laws were still being established, a common setting for origin myths.

In this chapter, I will analyze the way the time and place of myth are manipulated or played with in my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. Since one of the criteria of my sample is that each novel is partially set in a realistic time and place familiar to the twenty-first century reader, the way the times and places of myth are accessed are variable within the world-building of the novels.
An Example of the Use of Time, Place and a Space of Origin in *American Born Chinese*

A complicated example of a depiction of an origin space from young adult literature is Gene Luen Yang’s graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006). The story initially seems to reinforce the traditional folkloric separation between a world familiar to the reader and the traditional place and time of myth. The graphic novel initially tells three different stories divided among the nine chapters. The first, fourth and seventh chapters focus on the Monkey King who, after being embarrassed and denied entry to a party for the gods in Heaven, returns to his home on the Flower-Fruit Mountain, seeking to change his appearance and to master the disciplines of Kung Fu.

The initial time and place of the Monkey King’s quest are not directly narrated. His first chapter begins, “one bright and starry night…” (p. 7) and the gods’ party is shown to be on a cloud in the sky. The music “and the scent of their wine drifted down…down…down…to Flower Fruit Mountain…where flowers bloomed year-round…and fruits hung heavy with nectar…and monkey frolicked under the watchful eye of the magical Monkey King” (p. 8). The eternal nature of the fruit and flowers of the Monkey King’s mountain implies that there are magical or mythic properties to the location and that the story of the Monkey King is set in a different world than that known to the reader.

This is reinforced by the panels of illustrations Yang pairs with the text. The world the Monkey King travels in is fantastic, with many rocks, green vines and trees and
either starry night skies or grey or brown day skies. The Monkey King travels to the heavens, under the Eastern Sea (p. 61) and once, travels much further in an attempt to escape his creator, Tze-yo-Tzuh. The narration includes, “[The Monkey King] flew past the planets and the stars. He flew past the edges of the universe. He flew through the boundaries of reality itself” (p. 72). The panels that accompany the narration are included in Figure 5:

Figure 5:  *American Born Chinese*, p. 72 (*American Born Chinese*, 2006, p. 72)

The Monkey King’s story is set within the mythic space of creation, where the gods walk the Earth and fly through the sky and across the universe. As the Monkey King tries to
flee Tze-yo-Tzuh’s reach, he travels beyond the boundaries of reality. The illustration supports this by showing nothingness behind him and the Monkey King breaking the frame of the panel in Figure 5.

The other two plotlines in *American Born Chinese* are set in a time and place that may be familiar to the reader: In chapters two, five and eight, Jin Wang has moved from San Francisco to a new school. Although his new city’s name is not included and the demographics of the area are not explicitly revealed, most of the students are depicted as white. The school has posters of the English alphabet and math equations on the walls and blackboard (p. 30). During recess the students play tetherball, hopscotch and tag (p. 32), all possibly familiar aspects of daily life and activities to many who have experienced Western, and specifically American middle class culture. There is no evidence of magic, of the gods or of the Monkey King included in these chapters. Jin is positioned as an outsider in his new community as he works to adapt to his new environment.

In chapters three and six of *American Born Chinese*, Danny, a white teenage boy who attends Oliphant High School, seems to live in an ordinary world that follows the same rules as Jin’s and the reader’s. He must deal with the annual visit of his cousin Chin-Kee from China. Chin-Kee is illustrated as having a long braid and buck teeth and as wearing traditional Chinese robes. He enjoys a meal of “crispy fried cat gizzards wiff noodle” (p. 114). He answers every question in each of Danny’s classes (pp. 111, 119). Chin-Kee even pees in the soft drink of Danny’s friend, Steve and sings the rhyme, “Me Chinese, Me play joke! Me go pee-pee in his coke!” (p. 118). Chin-Kee’s stereotypical characterization and behaviors embarrass his cousin. Danny reveals to his friend, Steve:
“Every year around this time, I finally start getting the hang of things, you know? I’ve made some friends, gotten a handle on my schoolwork, even started talking to some of the ladies. I finally start coming into my own.

“Then he comes along for one of his visits…

“…He comes for a week or two and follows me to school, talking his stupid talk, and eating his stupid food. Embarrassing the crap out of me.

“By the time he leaves, no one thinks of me as Danny anymore. I’m Chin-Kee’s cousin. It gets so bad by the end of the school year that I have to switch schools.”

(pp. 126-127, emphasis present in text)

Despite Chin-Kee’s stereotypical characterization, both Jin and Danny exist in a time and place meant to be familiar to the ideal reader. They are both students in middle class, suburban, early twenty-first century America. The seemingly separate worlds of the stories of the Monkey King and those of Jin and Danny come to a collision at the end of the eighth chapter, in which Danny is revealed to be a teenaged and assimilated version of Jin (pp. 194-199).

As I was reading this graphic novel for the first time, I accepted this shift in characterization relatively easily. The two characters, initially positioned separately, had been dealing with different dimensions of what it means to be an American teenager, in similar settings. The differences in names and appearances shifting into one (included as Figure 6) were easy to accept while I was reading due to the visual nature of the graphic novel. I could reconcile these two different time periods with a gap of several years and the missing narration between them.
However, in chapter nine, Danny’s cousin Chin-Kee is revealed to be the Monkey King in disguise as the two fight over Chin-Kee’s embarrassing behavior (pp 212-213). The re-presentation of the myth of the Monkey King not only has implications for Jin/Danny, but aspects of the myth reverberate in the present-day suburban American setting.

The first time I read this graphic novel, the revelation that the Monkey King still existed in the world of Jin and Danny was startling. I had to stop reading and reflect on the previous 211 pages to try to integrate this new information and see if these two worlds, these two times, could coexist and mingle, could connect and become one larger story.

The only hint that implied the magic usually associated with the time and place of the myth of the Monkey King is present in the realistic world of Danny and Jin is shown.
through Jin’s best friend, a “fresh off the boat” (p. 89) immigrant boy from Taiwan, named Wei-Chin. In the novel, after the Monkey King’s appearance in Danny/Jin’s world, the Monkey King reveals that Wei-Chin is actually his son, also a monkey, who, as a test of virtue, must “live in the mortal world for forty years, all the while remaining free of human vice” (p. 217).

Before the reader knows his true identity as a monkey, Wei-Chin is shown caring for a monkey for his science class. In the bottom-left panel, he grasps a monkey’s hand. But, due to the cropping of the panel, the reader is left to guess if he is holding the hand of the caged monkey or his own (Figure 7). At the very least, Wei-Chin is positioned with the monkey, foreshadowing events later in the graphic novel.

Figure 7: *American Born Chinese*, p. 99  
These minglings of the time, place and characters of myth not only help to show the modern significance the Monkey King’s battle to first change who he is and then come to accept himself as a monkey and as he is, but readers who are immigrants, who have multiple cultures in their lives or who feel like outsiders may relate to this tension between the desire to blend with those around them and to feel the empowerment of being true to who they are, just as Jin/Danny and the Monkey King struggle to reconcile these.

_American Born Chinese_ also gives evidence to the expanding realms of myth. Even in the modern world, the mythic figures can still influence people and travel between the worlds of the myth and humanity. Other novels in the sample portray the time and place of myth in different ways. I have classified the ways the novels I analyzed re-present, include, challenge or overlap the use of the time and place of myth. All of the books within my sample expand the realm of myth in terms of time and place. (It was one of the requirements for them to be a part of my sample; i.e. the inclusion of mythic figures in a present-day setting).

**Myth and Time**

There are a number of different ways the place and time of myth may be understood. Some of those initial concepts revolve around the way mythical time is conceived, and whether it is 1) primordial—in which case a distant past may be accessible through ritual which is perceived to abolish linear time (Smedman, 1988;
whether time is 2) cyclical, with predictable patterns (Nikolajeva, 2000; Whitrow, 1980); whether time is 3) interwoven among history, fiction and myth (Bantly, 1996; Lincoln, 1996; Ricoeur, 1988); and whether time is 4) reversible (Nikolajeva, 2000)—in which case an event like somebody’s death can be undone (Table 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Mythic Time</th>
<th>Description of Mythic Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primordial</td>
<td>There is an ancient time of origin. This era may be reached through ritual or antagonists threatening to return the Earth to this state. <em>Thief Eyes</em> (Simner, 2010) is an example of this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyclical</td>
<td>Time is perceived as a closed ring and events are repeated throughout time. Riordan’s <em>The Red Pyramid</em> (2010a) includes this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interwoven</td>
<td>Views of time may vary among cultures or may overlap with understandings of history, be combined with fiction or be influenced by memory. This is presented in the Gods of Manhattan series (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reversible</td>
<td>The effects of time may be undone for the case of a specific event or act; such as death. This occurs in Riordan’s <em>The Lightning Thief</em> (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Presentations of mythic time within the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels
To illuminate all of these ways of perceiving mythical time, I describe them and pull examples from my sampled children’s novels. Within my sample of novels, representations of myth or characters performing rituals allow characters, and by extension the reader to glimpse this primordial time and draw a portion of it into the human linear time to make comparisons or to contemplate the structure of the world. The inclusions of cyclical, interwoven and reversible perceptions of time expand the realm of myth beyond the traditional folkloric positioning of primordial mythic time, which is common with origin myths.

**Primordial time or the time of creation.**

As previously mentioned in this chapter and in Chapter One, primordial time may be described as the most commonly used time in traditional myth, a time long ago in an unrecognizable developing land of origin or in a remote past. “In the beginning…” or “Before the world was as it is now…” are phrases that often mark the start of a traditional myth, specifically an origin myth set in a primordial time. In Virginia Hamilton’s *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* (1988), she describes creation myths in the Author’s Note that begins the anthology:

The classic opening, although not the only opening, of a creation myth is “In the beginning….” The most striking purpose of a creation myth is to explain something. Yet it also asks questions and gives reasons why groups of people perform certain rituals and live a particular way. Creation myths describe a place
and a time impossible for us to see for ourselves. People everywhere have creation myths, revealing how they view themselves to themselves in ways that are movingly personal. (pp. x-xi, emphasis present in text)

Although these myths tell people about themselves, the settings of origin myths are removed from linear time. Eric Csapo, who has compiled a critical summation of the theories of and approaches to mythology, notes, “Myths are described as timeless and this timelessness allegedly endows myth with its unique power and beauty” (p. 236). This supposed separateness in the temporal setting of myth is arguably what lends to its relatability and universality. Because a myth is timeless, there is always something a person can learn from it.

In a version of the Cupid and Psyche story by Clemence McLaren (2002) in her anthology of retelling of Greek myths that feature romance, *Aphrodite’s Blessings: Love stories from Greek Myths*, McLaren retells the myth so the reader can choose to show loved ones trust, a choice that could be new to a young reader. The opening lines from the short story about Cupid and Psyche’s union state, “Whether you believe the story of my marriage to a supernatural being, of living surrounded by powerful magic, is not important. What is important are the lessons it teaches, lessons that I had to learn” (2002, 133). As Psyche begins to narrate her story, she not only establishes a world in which magic and marriage to a supernatural creature are possible, but adds the idea that the reader may learn about love from this retelling of a traditional myth, even though “you,” the modern reader, do not live in this same world. The argument is that the lesson and emotional truth of the story are timeless.

Part of this power of myth is the assumption that some of the lessons attached are
not only meaningful now, but are also sacred to some. Mircea Eliade also speaks to the historical understanding of the separateness of the temporal setting of myth and to its sacredness:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in a primordial Time, the fabled time of the “beginnings.” In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a “creation”; it relates how something was produced, began to be. (1976, p. 3, emphasis present in text)

Although Eliade would argue for a separateness between this mythic place of creation and the reality people today inhabit, I could argue that culture and an individual’s reality are always in the process of being created or confirmed and their position in a structure of the world is in flux. Eliade has also written about the tendency for cultures to reclaim a “noble origin” for a group of people. He notes about early nineteenth-century European cultures:

All through Central and Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century the mirage of “noble origin” aroused nothing short of a passion for national history, especially for its earliest phases. “A people without history” (read: without “historical documents” or without historiography) “is as if it did not exist!” This anxiety is perceptible in all the national historians of Central and Eastern Europe. Such a passion for national historiography was, to be sure, a consequence of the awakening of nationalities in this part of Europe. Then too, it
was soon transformed into an instrument of propaganda and political warfare.

But the desire to prove the “noble origin” and “antiquity” of one’s people dominates Southeastern Europe to such an extent that, with few exceptions, all of the respective historians confined themselves to national history and finally wound up in cultural provincialism.

The passion for “noble origin” also explains the racist myth of “Aryanism” which periodically gains currency in the West, especially in Germany. (1985, p. 44)

With what I would argue to be less dangerous reclamations, the young adult and middle grade children’s literature within this sample and study still draw upon various origins to connect the present-day to the larger dialogue of myth.

In Karen Healey’s *Guardian of the Dead* (2010), a young adult novel set in present-day New Zealand where Māori beliefs are pervasive, a character named Mark tells the origin myth of the trickster Māui, who sought immortality by trying to steal it from the sleeping Hine-nui-te-pō, a goddess and the guardian of the dead. Māui failed to achieve immortality. Mark retells the myth:

“[Māui] goes into the underworld, to the cave of Hine-nui-te-pō, who was once in ages past the maiden of the dawn, and who now guards the dead while she sleeps. She is enormous in her slumber, sitting against the wall with her giant legs splayed. Māui can see sharp teeth of greenstone and obsidian at the junction of her thighs. He knows that to conquer death for all time, he must make a reversal of birth.

“Before he makes this attempt, he swears his bird companions to absolute silence. One breath of sound might wake the goddess. They all promise to keep quiet.
And then, while she snores, he crawls into the cave between her legs.

“But he looks so ridiculous, wriggling his way into her, with his legs sticking out and his feet squirming in the air. The birds take deep breath after deep breath, until all their cheeks puff up and they are dying with the need to laugh.

“And then the fantail surrenders to this need, and lets out a trilling burst of mocking song.”

Mark brought his hands sharply together. “At once Hine-nui-te-pō wakes, and crushes the impudent man between her thighs. He dies in shame. Worse, in trying to prevent death, he invites it. And ever since, all living things are mortal and must die, to be received and protected by the guardian of the dead. (pp. 172-173)

The myth, set in a primordial time, gives shape to the world and to the concept of mortality as the modern characters and reader understand it. Mark goes on to note that “It’s the shape of the story that matters, the way belief forms around it. The story has real weight” (p. 173). Despite the myth’s separateness from the characters it still influences the present-day world of the novel. The protagonist, Ellie, later feels the true weight of the story when she enters the mists and must talk with a waking Hine-nui-te-pō, showing that the creation process for the world may still be ongoing, that the world can be amended and that the primordial time is not as gone as otherwise thought. This is also a tension in Sarwat Chadda’s *Dark Goddess* (2010) the second book in the Devil’s Kiss series (2009, 2010). In the novel, the goddess Baba Yaga, hating the way humanity has damaged the environment, wants to return the world to its natural state or origin, free of human civilizations. The possibility of humanity experiencing primordial time is often
dangerous or threatening for them throughout my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. It represents a loss of the familiar, a separation from the primordial time and space as something the protagonists wish to maintain to prevent death or chaos.

**Primordial time and ritual.**

Aside from travelling to a mythic realm, way of accessing this primordial sense of time may be attempted when characters try to transcend linear time to perceive mythical time without travelling. One way of doing this is with ritual. In *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (1980), G.J. Whitrow focuses on the idea of abolishing a sense of time through ritual acts. He specifically applies this concept of mythical time to ancient or “primitive” man when he writes:

> Indeed, for long the aspects of time which were of primary significance for the human mind were not duration, trend and irreversibility, but repetition and simultaneity. These were the characteristic features of what has been called ‘mythical time’. In primitive thought we find innumerable examples of the belief that an object or an act is ‘real’ only in so far as it imitates or repeats an ideal prototype. We are therefore, presented with the paradoxical situation that in his first conscious awareness of time man instinctively sought to transcend, or abolish, time. In particular, every ritual sacrifice was believed to reproduce an initial divine sacrifice and coincide with it. (pp. 54-55)

The focus here is on ritual. By repeating, re-presenting or symbolizing a myth through
ceremony or retelling, participants wish to abolish linear time and be present in the moment of the ideal—possibly through an act, object or story. This idea may be extended to the re-presentation of mythic figures throughout history and in the present. What are retellings, re-presentations and reinterpretations but repetitions of characters to show how they are still present in the author and readers’ twenty-first century world? The fact that time has passed does not matter, the mythic figures are still influencing us.

This idea parallels M. Sarah Smedman’s view of myth in children’s literature (1988). When introducing the connection between myth and ritual, Smedman notes that, “In cultures which take myth seriously people believe that such rituals cut through the present, enabling them to live, momentarily, beyond chronological time in primordial, sacred time” (p. 93). (Sidenote—I have yet to find a culture that does not take some myths seriously.) This going “beyond chronological time” parallels the sense of abolishing time that Whitrow describes. In ritual, the gods are present just as they were, are and will be in the time of origin.

When examining children’s literature, perhaps writing and reading the stories can be perceived as the ritual act of embracing myth. At the very least, referencing myths, leaning upon them to help fill in the gaps of a modern narrative, bringing forth ancient stories in readers’ minds or encouraging readers to learn those myths for the first time may lead them to think beyond chronological time. By pairing myth and re-presentations in thought or in the act or writing maintains a sense of presence for the myth, a sense of universality and timelessness. A re-presentation gives a sense of the mythical in the here and now, abolishing the sense that myth belongs solely to a distant time.

Smedman notes that, “stories are not rituals, but they do provide the foundation
from which rituals arise; as acts of naming experience, stories express in a different mode the truths that actual rituals attempt to express dynamically” (pp. 105-106). Stories may reveal the language and other aspects of the ritual. For example, in Janni Lee Simner’s young adult novel, Thief Eyes (2010), magical rituals are performed multiple times to connect characters across time, showing the power ritual can have within a story.

Triggering the plot of the story, an Icelandic woman named Hallgerd from the ancient past casts a spell to have one of her descendants take her place in what she expects will be an unhappy marriage. After sacrificing a fox, boiling its blood as well as doing a number of other acts to complete her ritual, a magical path through time opens up before Hallgerd. She narrates:

On the path, I see the years of my life laid out before me. I see beyond those years, to times when our warriors cast aside their swords and our weavers their looms, when our stories are turned to runes bound in leather, nothing more. Difficult times—but what time is not difficult? Better a difficult life than one controlled by others. So said my forebears when they parted ways with the Norwegian king and sailed for this land. So say I, as I look down the path. I see my daughter, by Thorvald or another man, I cannot tell…I will go farther—beyond my life, and my daughter’s life, and every last tie between my father and me.

I see my daughter’s daughters, and their daughters in turn, the path they stand upon branching as it stretches through time. (pp. 3-4)

Through her ritual, Hallgerd eventually sees Haley, the protagonist and Haley’s mother, who, by accepting a coin from Hallgerd, is dragged back through time.
The ritual presented in *Thief Eyes* allows the female family members to connect outside of time. Haley eventually repeats the same ritual, using Hallgerd’s coin, to put the spell to rest. As Haley does this, she sees her family line all the way back to Hallgerd, to whom she must return the coin. Haley narrates:

I saw back, past the years of my own life, to a time before cars and airplanes, when homes were made of wood and grass, when dragon ships sailed the seas and cloth was woven on weighted looms. I saw stories released from their pages, not bound in books but free to be spoken and remembered. I saw—

My mother standing on the path, almost close enough to touch, her face streaked with angry tears.

…I fought to look back, but the path pulled me on, past other women: the grandmother I barely knew, because she lived in Canada; the great-grandmother I’d met only in old photos; her mother and grandmother and great-grandmother in turn.

…Each of them looked at me in turn, and then my gaze was pulled farther back, and farther still, for countless generations until—

“*Haley!*”

A kneeling woman glared up at me, holding a feathered arrow in one hand. She [Hallgerd] was older now, with lines around her eyes and mouth, but I knew her. I’d never forget her or what she’d done.

…“*Why do you seek me, Haley, I have left you to your life. Leave me to mine.*”

She never should have cast her spell if she wanted to be left alone. I drew the coin out of the blood, just like my spell said to do. “I brought you a gift!” I
Thief Eyes presents ritual as a way to abolish time, a way for generations, thousands of years apart, to meet and influence one another through magic and myth.

**Time as a cycle.**

Connected to this sense of repeated ritual is the conceptualization that mythical time is cyclical, or that time is closed like a ring in which the events repeat (Whitrow, 1980). Maria Nikolajeva (2000), who has examined the use of time in children’s literature, describes this perception of time as being more common in idyllic realistic children’s novels. She examines how in books like *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1990) and *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame, 2008) the cyclical nature of the seasons brings the stories’ plots full circle.

While not idyllic, an example of this occurs with Riordan’s exploration of Egyptian myths within the first novel of the Kane Chronicles, *The Red Pyramid* (2010a). The leader of the magicians, or the House of Life, is Chief Lector Iskandar. He shares with the protagonists, Carter and Sadie Kane, a myth about Osiris and concludes:

“…As I said—an old story, but one that the gods have repeated many times in our history.”

“Repeated?”

“The gods follow patterns. In some ways they are quite predictable: acting out the same squabbles, the same jealousies down through the ages. Only the settings change, and the hosts.” (p. 179)
This idea of time being a repeatable cycle presents a dependable timeline to explain the meaning of myth within the world. While many of the young adult and middle grade novels within my sample include repetition of the conflicts and themes common in myth, *The Red Pyramid* is the only that directly mentions a cyclical understanding of time. Nikolajeva notes that this type of temporal setting obliterates any linear developments as superfluous as a narrative featuring circular time “goes deeper and deeper into mythical time,” evoking this understanding of time’s sacred nature (pp. 34-35). While never ending, the use of this time scale seems to negate the possibility of change and evolution, instead drawing comfort in familiar patterns or repeatedly playing with certain tensions or themes.

**Time as an interweaving of fiction and history.**

Culturally-bound understandings of time and myth may also influence the way individuals perceive the realm of myth, and how separate they may be from the reality of the reader or listener. To explore this from one perspective, Francisca Cho Bantly writes in terms of accommodating various cultures’ understandings of myth, most specifically in the case of Chinese culture:

In the Chinese case, the relationship between myth and temporality is radically reformulated. A significant thesis of this study is that the Chinese context archetypes are constantly appropriated and repeated within historical time rather than outside of it. For the Chinese, history does not bring novelty as much as it provides an opportunity to demonstrate how much things remain the same. (1996,
The problems the Monkey King has with reconciling himself with who he is and his status among the other gods in *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) is the same struggle that the modern characters and readers face. Many of the problems, tensions and emotions presented in traditional myths are the same in the present and future myths. Some aspects of life and the human experience are consistent.

This idea of repeating aspects of myth within historical time is explored in another way within American culture by Bruce Lincoln (1996). Lincoln interprets the history of how different nationality groups arrived in the United States as a mythic narrative:

> It is possible to speak of all these materials as American myths and to see them as a general narrative pattern insofar as they all describe an originary voyage made by a set of primordial ancestors and the encounters those people had with others, whom they found already resident in this land. (p. 170)

Taking this idea, stories about a nation’s history may be interpreted as myth since they involve sharing narratives, regarding a world different from the one understood by present-day readers that contributes to how the world came to be as citizens understand it now. The United States before highways, before air travel and before minivans, the America of when older family members immigrated here may seem like another world than the one a young child has always known.

Scott Mebus’s *The Gods of Manhattan* trilogy is also relevant in connecting history to the mythic realm. The gods Mebus presents in his trilogy are not those of an ancient civilization, but are figures from American and New York City history. A
character named Hex explains how the gods are created in the mythic realm of Mannahatta. He says:

“When a mortal does something great, he is reborn in Mannahatta as a spirit. If his legend grows enough, he might be fortunate enough to ascend to godhood. Of course, it all depends on what they’re remembered for. Mannahatta is littered with the spirits of famous gangsters, so very few of them become gods, since there’s room for only so many gods of crime. But there aren’t many contenders for the job of God of Alternative Side of the Street Parking, which is how Alan Tuddle rose to the position simply by being remembered as the guy who always got a spot.” (p. 68)

This sense of memory keeps these historical figures alive in the present. (This concept within my sample will be explored further in Chapter Five as the creation of new myth.) The historic figures become gods and history, like myth, survives, interweaving history with fiction and with myth.

Paul Ricoeur, who focuses on the use of time in history and fiction (1988), describes how the seemingly dichotomous history and fiction interweave—despite some contradictions—to create meaning for time:

The interweaving of history and fiction in the refiguration of time rests, in the final analysis, upon the reciprocal overlapping, the quasi-historical moment of fiction changing places with the quasi-fictive moment of history. In this interweaving, this reciprocal overlapping, this exchange of places, originates what is commonly called human time, where the standing-for the past in history is united with the imaginative variations of fiction, against the background of the
Although Ricoeur is not directly writing about myth, he notes the difficulty of differentiating between history and fiction, the way they overlap to form the way people understand time. Within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, fiction, magic and history weave together to give the reader a unique understanding of how time exists and has passed.

**The reversible hour.**

In her study in which she explores the way time is used in children’s literature, Nikolajeva (2000) describes how most of Western children’s literature uses linear time. In contrast, she asserts that mythic time or *Kairos*, is “reversible” (p. 5). She specifically applies this definition to the difficult concept of death. She writes, “The myth of the returning god, the most universal myth in all cultures, presupposes that death is always followed by resurrection” (p. 6). In the case of death, linear time’s influence on an individual is reversible. To pull from my sample of children’s novels, the first novel of the Percy Jackson series, *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005), challenges a linear understanding of death and promotes a reversible understanding when Percy’s mother, Sally, dies while protecting him. Percy then goes on a personal quest to return her to the state of living. This encourages the reader to consider a mythic understanding of time instead of just a linear understanding. When Percy successfully saves his mother, she is returned to the living realm and has no memory of her death or any sense that time has passed. Percy narrates: “She didn’t remember anything since the Minotaur [attack that
killed her], and couldn’t believe it when Gabe told her I was a wanted criminal, traveling across the country, blowing up national monuments” (p. 347). In this case, time is neither abolished nor cyclical, but its effects are reversible, providing comfort to the characters and possibly to the reader that what is lost may be found again.

**Myth and Place**

In Carrie Jones’s Need series (2009, 2010a, 2010b), after her boyfriend Nick is carried off by a Valkyrie to Valhalla to become one of the Norse god Odin’s warriors, the protagonist, Zara, tries to find a way to reach Valhalla to bring him back. Her search causes her to sacrifice her own humanity and turn into a pixie. She also travels to Iceland and New York City in search of a physical bridge joining the human world to the Norse realm of Valhalla. It is finally in her own backyard in Bedford, Maine that she manages to complete a ritual with several of her friends and create a rainbow bridge to Valhalla. As she leaves the human realm, she narrates:

Yes, I am running on a rainbow and, yes, I am no longer human, but it doesn’t matter. All that matters is getting to Nick. A white bird circles in the sky over my head, leading my way as I leave behind the world of humans, leave behind the world of questions and wiggly lines between good and evil, leave behind all the mistakes I’ve made.

To my left are mounds of earth that look like fairy tombs; to my right is a meadow on a hill where suddenly it is spring. The air is warm and amazing, smelling of lilacs and thawing ground. On top of the hill wait large standing
stones like at Stonehenge. They are in a circle reaching toward the sun. It is so beautiful here. It is nothing like Maine. No naked tree limbs scratch the sky. No ice beneath my feet. No snow.

…“This can’t be real,” I pant. “How can this be real?”

A giant white man explodes out the center door [of a building]. He carries a horn. He has a Viking-style hat on his head and more horns stick out of the sides above his ears. I think they are ram horns, but honestly, I have no freaking clue.

“Hold!” he bellows. “Who are you that cross to the realm of the gods?”

Oh my gosh. Did he just say “hold?” Who says “hold”? Who wears Viking hats? And his teeth? His teeth are gold, like he’s gone all rap star and had them capped with precious metal. I stop in front of him, panting, hands on my hips.

“Zara.”

I try to say it as bravely as I can. I try to act like all of this is perfectly normal, because if I don’t? I will start totally freaking out.

He eyes me and lowers his voice. “I am Heimdall, protector of the gods, guarder of Asgard and Valhalla.” (2010b, pp. 224-226)

Zara creates a bridge to the mythic realm of the Norse gods. But, even after arriving, she has trouble believing the place is real. Plus, it is only after she sacrificed her humanity that Zara could enter the mythic realm. In this way, the Need series is different from many of the other novels within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. In most of the other stories, the gods come to the human realm, at least for portions of the stories.

In *The Red Pyramid* (Riordan, 2010a) in contrast, the Egyptian gods are described
as inhabiting two places at once. Sadie and Carter Kane’s uncle, Amos, explains that the gods “are primal forces, you understand, a sort of bridge between humanity and nature. They are depicted with animal heads to show that they exist in two different worlds at once” (p. 56). Their existence occurs in two worlds, connecting them and the worlds. In this re-presentation the gods are the bridge. This sense of being in two places at once explains why the Egyptian gods may appear in many overlapping forms between animal and human shapes.

This brings me to the use of place of myth in present-day re-presentations. Instead of being set in the primordial space described in the previous section on time, most of the novels in my sample focus on the mortals’ side of the bridge (Table 9).
## Presentations of Mythic Place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways to Access Mythic Place</th>
<th>Description of the Mythic Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bridge</strong></td>
<td>The mythic place is presented as a separate world that may be accessed through the act of crossing a bridge, breaking through a barrier, entering a door, etc. The Need series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) and the New Policeman series (Thompson, 2007, 2008, 2010) include these modes of access.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Superimposed Map</strong></td>
<td>The mythic place is superimposed upon realistic locations, giving the ordinary a sense of the extraordinary. This re-presentation is included in Riordan’s Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), the Heroes of Olympus series (2010b) and in Deming’s <em>Iris, Messenger</em> (2007), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within the Borders of an Area</strong></td>
<td>The place of myth and its power are restricted to specific areas; a nation, island or city. This re-presentation is explored in <em>Thief Eyes</em> (Simner, 2010) and in Marsh’s the Night Tourist duology (2007, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Mythic Place That May Merge with the Ordinary World</strong></td>
<td>Although the mythic realm is initially presented as a separate world (possibly with bridges or locations where the worlds join), during the plot of the novels that present this plot device the separate worlds may merge; presenting a threat. This occurs in <em>What I Wore to Save the World</em> (Wood, 2009)</td>
</tr>
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Table 9: Presentations of Mythic Place within the Sample of Young Adult and Middle Grade Children’s Novels

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Myth in the realistic world.

Arguably, all of these re-presentations of mythic figures still occur in a space that is different from the one the reader knows: The story is presented on the pages of a book, in the voice of someone talking or in a picture on a screen. Suzanne Keen, who summarizes key issues and studies of story in *Narrative Form* (2003), notes that “every narrative invites the creation of a story world in the reader’s or listener’s mind. The characters and events of the story transpire within this imagined space, which may be lightly sketched or elaborately described in the text” (p. 108). The novels within my sample bring to mind spaces that are familiar, realistic, modern locations, sometimes incorporating landmarks and places the reader could visit in the real world. It was one of my criteria as I began researching for this study that the books be set in the early twenty-first century world—as much as any real location can be represented in the pages of a book. I required this because I was hoping to make arguments about what re-presented mythic figures can tell readers about their own world and lives. By creating familiar realistic settings in the imagined spaces, the reader is aware of a sense of familiarity and can draw implications about the imagined space into her understanding of the real world. Keen writes:

A reader attentive to the construction of a fictional world will notice both differences and similarities between it and the reader’s real world. Examining inclusions and omissions of fictional worlds, together with their truth claims, provides rich opportunities for interpretation of narrative as cultural and time-bound artifacts. (p. 120)
Novels set in a seemingly foreign fantasy world or on another planet may do this as well, but I wanted to deal with one less variable as I interpreted those cultural and time-bound artifacts. So, the question becomes what does it do to have mythic figures positioned as alive and running around countries, states and cities that readers may recognize as belonging to their time and world?

In *Narrative Setting and Dramatic Poetry* (1993), Mary Kuntz describes how specifically in Greek tragedies, the myths often are set in very specific and real geographic locations. She writes:

Geographic locale in most of the myths that form the basis for the tragic plots is extremely specific. The traditional stories of the Greeks do not occur in some generic setting; there is not, for Greek tragedy, the cottage in the woods or the castle of German folk tales. Oedipus rules not “a city long ago,” but Thebes, a particular and real city; the story of the sacrifice of Iphigenia is set at Aulis because that is where, in myth, her sacrifice is said to have occurred. To move these events to a different place is to tell a different story. Geographic locale in tragedy is as fixed in the tradition as the names of the characters or, in their broadest outline, the events. (p. 18)

The use of historical and real locations in Greek tragedy lends to the specificity of the stories. Kuntz argues that to change the location is to tell a different story. And that seems to be exactly what some authors are trying to do when setting mythic figures down in the present-day United States or other countries. They are making new myths for young cultures which still maintain a sense of history or connection to the past and to other cultures.
Mythic realms mapped onto real places.

In terms of setting, readers may see those “real” places in new ways within my sample of young adult and children’s novels. In the Percy Jackson series, the worlds of myth and humanity are superimposed, imbuing a mythic dimension to the familiar and ordinary world of the reader. As the ordinary becomes the extraordinary, the ideal reader, who is meant to see herself in Percy or one of his friends may feel empowered and as though she too has her own place in the myths of old and in those of today. For example, in The Titan’s Curse (2007), the third novel in the Percy Jackson series, Percy and several companions travel to the Hoover Dam. At first, the characters mention facts about the dam: that it is 700 feet tall, built in the 1930s, that it holds five million cubic acres of water, and that it is the largest construction project in the United States (pp. 205-206). But then, the characters make special note of the guardians, bronze statues that are carved into the side of the cliff. Percy and Thalia, a daughter of the god Zeus, discuss the “Oscar statues with wings” (p. 207):

“They were dedicated to Zeus when the dam was built,” Thalia said. “A gift from Athena.”

Tourists were clustered all around them. They seemed to be looking at the statues’ feet.

“What are they doing?” I asked.

“Rubbing the toes,” Thalia said. “They think it’s good luck.”

“Why?”
She shook her head. “Mortals get crazy ideas. They don’t know the statues are sacred to Zeus, but they know there’s something special about them.” (p. 207)

Through the dialogue among the characters, the reader may not only learn about a real national landmark, but she may also have a new understanding of it that focuses on its positioning as having mythical significance, whether real or imagined. It brings a real location into an imagined space for the reader and makes myth relevant to its construction and presence within society.

The Percy Jackson series maps Greek myth onto the American landscape, envisioning Mount Olympus in New York City, the underworld in Los Angeles and King Minos’s great Labyrinth underlying it all. By mapping Greek myth onto the geography of the United States, new possibilities for significance are opened. But at the same time, the reader’s imagination is also limited by what she knows of the real locations.

In the series, Gods of Manhattan by Scott Mebus (2008, 2009, 2010) the mythic world is mapped onto New York City, but most mortals fail to see it. Hex, a sorcerer, explains to Rory Hennessy, the one boy—called the Light—who can see the truth of the layered worlds:

“There is a world all around you that most mortals cannot see. We call it Mannahatta. Some say it is the spirit world, while others believe it is the city itself dreaming, or rather remembering. If something or someone was important enough, loved enough, feared enough, imagined enough, remembered enough, then it is reborn here in Mannahatta. In turn, Mannahatta overlaps the everyday world and whispers in its ear, keeping the memories of the city alive. If something big happens in Mannahatta, a fight between spirits perhaps, it can wash
over into the mortal world, causing everything from mild distress to riots and blackouts. But though we watch over them, most mortals will never see Mannahatta.” (pp. 59-60, emphasis present in text)

In similar fashion to Riordan’s Percy Jackson series, the worlds of Manhattan and Mannahatta are layered upon one another, influencing each other in ways that mortals cannot recognize. Since the locations in Mannahatta consist of buildings, parks and land from both history and the present, the reader learns about aspects of New York City life. The mythological aspects of the story are recognizable as real parts of an American reader’s national history.

It is important to note that Mebus’s series deviates from the majority of the other novels in my sample since the mythic figures included are not the gods of an ancient culture, but rather they are the gods of New York City and the island of Manhattan specifically. The gods and spirits presented in the novel are national and local heroes, explorers, writers and architects, creating a mythic system that is uniquely one of Manhattan. This aspect of the series will be explored in more depth in Chapters Six and Seven of this study.

The novel *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010) presents the mythic realm and its power differently. Set on the South Island of New Zealand, Ellie learns that in mists, passages to other realms exist, following Māori mythology. She asks a classmate, Mark, who has previously lived in the mists, about them as she struggles to understand their place in her real city, Christchurch, and how the fairies, or patupaiarehe, live in them:

“The mists are...sort of a real place and sort of not,” he said. “They’re connected to real places, in the bush and mountains and by the sea. Patupaiarehe can go
deep into the mists and move through them, but others can’t unless they’re very powerful, or have something very powerful. And…” he hesitated. “They’re real places to patupaiarehe. They make them real out of their belief. But if you go in and you don’t know what you’ll find, you could find yourself in any kind of place. You bring your own history, your own mythology with you.” (2010, p. 141, emphasis present in text)

The mists in Guardian of the Dead serve as the mythic realm where magic is real and locations and time operate differently than in the mortal world. What is more, the people who enter the mists help construct the land or world based on their own beliefs, their understanding of the world, their expectations. Because of this, people from other mythological or religious belief systems could enter the mists, see different things, but still have all of the variations be true. For the authors within this sample, writing may serve the same purposes as the mists, as they create worlds informed by beliefs with great variations depending upon their backgrounds, understandings of myth, their own experiences, positionings and concerns.

**The (limit of the) power of place.**

In some of the books in my sample, there are limits or specific boundaries to the place of myth. In the case of Katherine Marsh’s The Night Tourist (2007), and its sequel The Twilight Prisoner (2009), the spirits of the New York City underworld are limited to where they can travel. Although they must pass the days below ground, they spend the evenings flying over the surface of the city, the same space the mortals inhabit. Aspects
of traditional Greek myth and its underworld influence the structure of the New York City underworld. For example, Jack’s deceased mother, who finds peace after meeting him during his visit to the Underworld, travels on to Elysium, her final resting place or “the place of eternal peace,” (2009, p. 58). In Greek myths, the Elysian Fields are a “place of blessedness” where the good dead go (Hamilton, 1969, p. 43). In The Night Tourist, Elysium is “likely in the Hamptons” (2009, p. 58). This presents a value judgment about real locations for both the characters and the reader. The Hamptons, known as a vacation spot for New Yorkers and others, become the eternal resting place for the blessed in Marsh’s re-presentation of myth and reality.

The other spirits in Marsh’s The Night Tourist and its sequel The Twilight Prisoner, who have not yet reached their eternal resting spots, are restricted to remaining on the island of Manhattan because they “cannot fly over water” (2007, p. 75). This rule limits the scope of the power and the space of the mythic aspects of New York City. Plus, only people who have lived in the city may enter the city’s Underworld after their deaths.

The power of Myth, at first, seems similarly restricted by location in Simner’s Thief Eyes (2010). In this young adult novel, figures from Norse mythology still live in present-day Iceland, but the powers of the Norse mythic figures are limited. When Hallgerd, an ancient sorceress whose story is shared in the Icelandic epic, Njal’s Saga (1988), learns of her fate to marry a man she dislikes, she casts a spell to find a female descendant to take her place. Hallgerd describes how she can see her female descendants as branches during the spell. She describes how the “branch slips out of my reach, its daughters growing ghostly and faint as they journey across a different sea—until one of
them returns to this land” (pp. 4-5). Hallgerd’s magical influence is limited to Iceland. She cannot reach her descendants who emigrated. Only when her descendants, Haley and her mother, returned to Iceland could Hallgerd’s magic influence them.

Similarly, after Haley has been influenced by Hallgerd’s magic while in Iceland, she is also affected by two other Norse mythic figures, Freki the fox and Muninn the crow. Although, Freki is traditionally depicted as a wolf and Muninn as a raven, both animals are associated with the god Odin in Norse mythology (Hamilton, 1969, p. 455). Although Muninn, who has power over memory, casts a spell causing everyone to forget about her, Haley realizes the scope of his spell is limited and that her boyfriend, Jared, may still remember her since he is still in Tucson, Arizona and did not join her on her trip to Iceland. She exclaims that, “Muninn’s magic is only for Iceland” (p. 169), restricting the influence of the Norse Mythic figure, implying that even those who still believe in mythic figures but have left Iceland are separated from the gods of that land.

This concept that the power of myth only applies to the nation that conceived of it is later challenged in the novel when Haley has a vision of the future if she does not succeed in restraining the powers of the Norse mythic realm:

In a distant corner of my mind I saw more arrows, all aflame, landing throughout Iceland—south, west, east, north. I saw arrows flying beyond the island, too, landing in places I knew from maps: Greenland. England and Norway. The northeastern United States. Wherever arrows landed, cracks spread, tearing the land apart.

Seeing the future runs in our family. “That’d better not be the future.” I imagined the cracks in the earth spreading all the way to Tucson [where Haley is from]—all
the way around the world. I’d always assumed that whatever happened here, home would be safe. (pp. 199-200, emphasis present in text)

Despite the fact that the power of an individual mythic figure is restricted to his land of origin, the influence of the realm of myth is still interconnected to the entire world. It is not just her own life or Iceland Haley struggles to save, but the entire world.

*The threat of mixing realms.*

While the mythic places re-presented in the novels in some cases blur or overlap with the mortal protagonists’ world or in other cases are more restricted and separate, the blending between the mythic realm and human one, when explored in my sample, is often presented as a threat.

In *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* (2007), the first novel in a trilogy by Wood, before her junior year of high school, Morgan travels from her home in Connecticut to Ireland for a summer bike tour. While there, she begins to travel back and forth between the time of “long ago,” or the Celtic fairy realm and her modern reality. These transitions continue back and forth throughout the series as Morgan works to unify her identity as Morgan, the teenager, and Morganne, the goddess of Celtic myth. Her internal conflict reaches a climax when Titania, Morganne’s mother and the queen of the fairies, decides she wants to remove the veil separating the fairy realm from that of the humans in the final novel, *What I Wore to Save the World* (2009).

The combining of the mythic world with Morgan’s real world is considered dangerous and Morgan works to keep the veil in place. (Her specific way of preventing
the lifting of the veil is discussed further in Chapter Five.) Epona, the leader of a herd of unicorns explains to Morgan the danger of allowing the veil between the worlds to slip:

“We believe that if the human and magic worlds were merged again, the way they used to be in the long-ago times of myths and legend, it would mean the end not only of unicorns, but of faeries, trolls, leprechauns, pixies, mermaids and every other magical being you can think of. Santa Claus. Even the tooth fairy,” Epona said sadly. “All gone.”

I hated to think she was right—but inside, I knew that she was. When humans got scared, they came out fighting. No way could this be allowed to happen. (pp. 127-128)

Morgan decides to save the world by upholding the veil between the worlds, reinforcing a separation between the real and the mythic spaces.

As another approach to this idea that the merging of the worlds of myth and humans is a threat, in the first novel of the New Policeman trilogy (Thompson, 2007), the central problem within the young adult novel is that the inhabitants of Kinvara, Ireland lack time. The characters feel it flowing away from them. In an effort to find the source of the loss of time, the protagonist, J.J., travels through a “membrane” in a wall (p. 144), or the “time skin” that separates the human world (p. 222) from the mythic fairy realm of Tír na nÓg. He learns that the difference between that mythic realm and the human one is that the fairy realm does not have time. He also learns that the problem driving the loss of time in Kinvara is caused by a leak. A fairy named Aengus explains to him:

“…It’s the worlds that are different, not us. Yours has time. Ours doesn’t.” He glanced up at the sky. “At least,” he said, “it didn’t. Until the leak started.”
J.J. tried to absorb the information. It was an awful lot for a teenager, even a talented one, to get his head around. “You’re trying to tell me that time is leaking out of our world and into yours?”

“Exactly,” said Aengus.

So that’s why we never have enough of it?”

“Spot on.”

“And you have too much.”

“Way too much.”

“My God,” said J.J. “We have to do something about it.” (p. 218)

In Thompson’s re-presentation, the distinction between the mortal and mythic realms is in the use of time within the two places. Time is presented as a commodity that can be traded, leaked, lost and regained. As with Wood’s approach, a merging or imbalance between the two realms is a threat that must be resolved. The blurring of mythic and real worlds is also considered dangerous in Scott’s The Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, not an official part of my sample) and Chadda’s Devil’s Kiss series (2009, 2010).

This chapter has shown the way time and place are manipulated to include both familiar locations and conceptions of time and to share the mythic world, in which time and place are presented differently. Whether the time of myth is “mythic” because it is primordial and accessed through ritual, whether time is cyclical or reversible, or whether the mythic place presented is familiar or foreign, it is still being drawn upon in the reader’s own time and through her own understanding of the world. Authors play with mythic time and place in stories to call upon rituals or reveal the fantastic aspects of the
familiar parts of the reader’s own world or to present the dangers of too many fantastic influences. There are some restrictions to this confluence of then and now, here and there. Only certain places are represented in most of these children’s novels that play with mythic time and space, with New York City often being the focus. Whether playing with the way myth is understood across time, in imagined or in real places, whether it is perceived as having limited power or as being a threat, these constructed times and places may provide insights about the way the reader can understand her world and her position in it throughout time, place and myth.
Chapter Four: Paradigms in conflict and the reality of fantasy

Gods of Manhattan trilogy

_Iris, Messenger_

*Going Bovine*

New Policeman trilogy

*Hush, Hush series*

“Conflicting stories can be equally true. The sun is a ball of fire in space, yes. But its image you see as it crosses the sky, the life-giving warmth and light it brings to the earth—that was embodied by Ra. The sun was his throne, his source of power, his very spirit.”

~Bast addressing the conflicting truths of science and myth

Rick Riordan, _The Red Pyramid_, 2010a, p. 339

“For most of my life I thought the world was normal, round, safe, populated by people (good and bad) and animals (wild and tame), but then it turns out that’s not the way the world is. Reality isn’t round, it’s flat. There are edges where you can fall off and this October when I moved to Maine, I fell off one. That’s when I learned about pixies and shapeshifting weres. That’s when I learned about need and pain and how unsafe, how unround the world can really be.”

~Zara

Carrie Jones, _Captivate_, 2010a, p. 40

After Charlotte, a protagonist in Ursu’s Cronus Chronicles trilogy, learns that the Greek gods are real, she has trouble understanding the value of her middle school’s history class:

Once you learn that humanity’s troubles were created when Zeus sent Pandora to Earth with a sealed jar containing all the world’s evils and an unhealthy sense of
curiosity, it’s hard to take history class too seriously.

But on the test, when they ask you to write an essay about the causes of World War II, you’re not supposed to put down, “Because the gods don’t give a monkey’s butt about anyone but themselves.” But Charlotte really didn’t have anything else to say. So her teachers said she wasn’t applying herself, and she couldn’t exactly tell them she’d applied herself just fine in the Underworld.

(2007, p. 25)

Charlotte’s understanding of what is reality and what is fantasy changed after she learned the Greek gods exist and had traveled to the Underworld to prevent a coup against the god Hades. Charlotte began to see the world in a new way, from a new position, from a different worldview or paradigm. Because she believes in an explanation of the world that her teachers do not, she has trouble in school. Following this example this chapter explores the way fantasy, reality and present-day paradigms are explored within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels.

**Myth and Fantasy**

As I began reading for this study, I noticed that the majority of the books included in my sample would be classified as children’s fantasy according to librarians, booksellers and my own categorizations of what fantasy is. This is in many ways understandable, since myth birthed many of the common conflicts and creatures present throughout fantasy novels and since the two are often intertwined or associated with one another. Randy Broecker assembled an illustrated history of the fantasy genre. He
The earliest roots of fantasy literature can be found in the epic poem *Gilgamesh* circa 2000 B.C. and in other classical works such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*. These, along with the mythologies of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Germanic peoples all with their various deities, form the basis of heroic fantasy. It is quite possibly the oldest theme in literature. (2001, p. 11, emphasis added)

Since myths provide the roots for heroic fantasy it may feel natural to categorize represented myths within this literary genre. Ruth Nadelman Lynn defines fantasy literature as “a broad term used to describe books in which magic causes impossible, and often wondrous, events to occur” (1983, p. 1). Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman note that fantasy literature “can be set in the real world that we inhabit or it can occur in a place or time invented by the author and governed by its own rules and values” (2009, p. 214). They also note that “fantasy often disguises itself as unrelated to fact, lowering the reader’s guard and inserting “information and values” that the reader internalizes” (2009, p. 214). When a reader thinks of a novel as fantasy, she may be influenced by the values and ideas in subtle or indirect ways.

Writing about Laurence Yep’s myth-based fantasy stories, Woo (2006) notes that fantasy novels may expand upon myth:

Fantasy coheres as a genre and offers such a wealth of meaning because it springs from and enriches a mythology: a people’s foundational stories of their origins, identity, cultural values, experiences, and homeland. It draws types from folklore such as the trickster or the unlikely hero that can have real-life analogues, and
imaginary beasts that have no real-life equivalent. In addition, fantasy invents its own forms of magic, imaginary realms, and posited worlds, elaborating on existing mythologies. (2006, p. 261)

While children’s fantasy novels present characterizations and information on mythic figures from the safe realm of the “untruth,” they still bring ancient myth to life in the imagination of the reader.

T.E. Apter describes the way fantasy literature provides insights into the reality the reader perceives:

The aim and purpose of fantasy in literature are not necessarily different from those of the most exacting realism. What is called ‘truth’ in fiction is often hypothetical: if a character has certain traits, then one is likely to find, or enlightened by finding in him, other, related traits; also, if a character has certain traits then his actions and responses are already to some extent circumscribed. Yet hypotheses in fiction, however ‘realistic’, must be imaginative as well as plausible. At each state in the work the artist is faced with the choices and decisions that may not have been foreseen at a previous stage. The ‘truth’ of fiction is attributable not only to the integration of character traits, the balance of motives, the consequences of actions and the development of events, but also to the ways in which new plausibilities are spotted, and the ways in which the artist’s decisions create possibilities which throw light on various characters, their motives, or their condition. Truth in fiction is not a study of probabilities but a utilization and discovery of both possibilities and plausibilities to make points about what is probably our world. (1982, p. 1)
The possibilities of fantasy, when plausible, may reveal truth. The distance or closeness myth has from or to what a reader perceives to be reality depends upon the writer, reader and their interpretations of the myth.

Reader Response theorist, Wolfgang Iser (1993) considers the connection between myth, literature and reality, describing literature as helping to make the ungraspable at least take shape:

Like myth, [literature] takes hold of the ungraspable, or rather appears to take hold of it. Yet it simultaneously discloses that the outcome is only to be taken as if it were real. From this results a close correspondence between literature and reality. (p. 212, emphasis present in text)

Authors then, may help to give image or symbol to the inaccessible, taking the deeper concerns that are perceived as unknowable and presenting them as a part of reality for the reader. The ways the author perceives the unknowable is influenced by the author’s own culture, experiences and background.

I chose to focus my study on novels that attempted to maintain the world and values of the one the reader will interpret to be like her own in the hopes that the ungraspable would be a little closer to the reader’s and my own metaphorical outstretched hands as we interpret the young adult and middle grade novels within this sample as if they describe the world we experience. I also wanted to include books that were not strictly “fantasy;” although most are still catalogued within that genre.

There is a sense of safety in describing re-presented myth as fantasy. By declaring a novel to be a fantasy, we also declare that while that story can tell us about the real world and its inhabitants, it is not real. Or, in other words, in the case of novels
that re-present mythic figures, it does not directly challenge predominate beliefs. Rather, those challenges are subtle. If classified as realistic fiction, novels that include mythic figures present powerful alternative ways to perceive reality that could offer the reader insight into relationships, culture and society; just as the novels considered fantasy do. I believe that whether classified as fantasy or reality, young adult and children’s novels have the power to challenge or deepen a reader’s perceptions of the world. There appears to be a safety in presenting mythic figures as characters in fantasy narratives: avoiding challenging other explanations for how reality is perceived and how the world works; which now fall to other predominating religions and to the sciences instead of to traditional myth.

**Unchallenged Myths**

Part of the way myth is popularly understood today may be ascribed to authors of the mid-nineteenth century who rewrote myths. According to Feldman and Richardson (1972):

> In the hands of these men and their imitators, Greek myths came to lose, in the popular mind, their aura of power, of dark origins, of religion, of passion, and of high strange truth, and they became instead something charming, graceful, and trivial. (pp. 506-507)

Even with the occasional attempt at censorship for religious reasons, traditional myth has lost its sense of historical truth and has transitioned into the realm of being fantasy or being removed from reality. White, who studies the use of Welsh myth in children’s
literature, notes the following about the use of fantasy with children:

It would be more accurate to say that our perceptions of the child audience affect our choices as writers, editors, publishers, parents, teachers. If we perceive children as natural innocents who come to us trailing clouds of glory, we will try to protect them from ideas and topics which we, as the cultural gatekeepers, think would harm their innocence...we would excise passages that might have a corrupting influence. If we were subversive writers who call such actions censorship, we would try to outwit the gatekeepers in order to tell children the truth. One of the best methods to bypass the gatekeepers is to write fantasy.

(1998, p. 142)

By describing the characters of myth and myth itself as fantasy some authors, parents, teachers, publishers, booksellers or other gatekeepers challenge other ways of understanding reality and the world indirectly, allowing readers to accept some of the lessons and truths myth may share with young readers without censorship. These texts allow for the mythic figures and the myths they reference to fall comfortably into the realm of untruth, even if the characters and underlying significance assert otherwise.

Yet in some ways, the fact that there are not more challenges of re-presented myths and mythic figures within my sample is surprising. These stories tend to deal with the deepest questions of the human condition without flinching. The young adult and middle grade children’s novels in my sample regularly explore themes of death and loss, question reality or include characters committing acts of violence. Gerard Jones (2002) contemplated the influence violence in popular culture has upon child viewers and readers:
Rage, cataclysm, and irreconcilable conflict, both external and internal, were once taken for granted as elements of the human condition, and violence stood as a symbol of them in every kind of narrative. The keynote of Classical literature is sounded in the opening phrase of *The Iliad*: “Menîn aide Thea,” “Of rage sing, Goddess,” an invocation of poetic power to express the divine but destructive passion of Achilles. Every body of sacred lore is woven of conflicts and murders and bloody devourings. Even pacifist traditions are transmitted through metaphors of violence; Jesus brought not peace but a sword, and if we meet the Buddha in the road we are urged to kill him. Until the last few decades, all our civic myths, all our entreaties to collective action, were written in war and martyrdom. Generations of children were soothed to sleep with the witch-torturing, limb-severing, child-devouring horror of fairy tales. (p. 129)

Despite the regular depiction of violence, myth and other traditional tales are very rarely the subject of challenges or censorship.

Riordan’s Percy Jackson series exemplifies all of these facets and themes. The first novel, *The Lightning Thief* (2005), includes extensive fight scenes, deals with death and is categorized safely in the realm of fantasy despite the protagonist’s assertions that his experiences are real. On the opening page of the novel, Percy narrates, “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” (p. 1). Percy challenges the idea that his story is fantasy. This opposes the peritextual assumption that this novel is categorized as fiction and as fantasy.
The Source of Magic and the Gods’ Power: Remembering the past

When dealing with the fantastic set in a present-day realistic setting within my sample, the source of the magic of myth is often explained or justified to mortal characters who are novice to the magical realities of their world (Table 10).
Possible Sources of Magic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Magic</th>
<th>Example Novels from the Sample That Include These Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An Ancient Object or Relic</td>
<td><em>The Red Pyramid</em> (Riordan, 2010a) and Egyptian artifacts or <em>The Cronus Chronicles</em> (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009) and Poseidon’s trident, which the holder may use to influence the physical world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories of Characters, Mortals or of the Land</td>
<td><em>Thief Eyes</em> (Simner, 2010) and <em>Iris, Messenger</em> (Deming, 2007) include themes that if human characters remember the gods, the gods will survive. In the <em>Gods of Manhattan</em> series (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010) both mortals and the land may remember the gods and spirits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Explanation given or the Gods Are Assumed to Be Independent from People, Belief or the Physical Realm</td>
<td>Most of the novels do not include discussion of the source of the mythic figures’ powers. Examples include the <em>Need</em> series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), the <em>Cronus Chronicles</em> (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009), which while there are magic objects that are sources of power, most of the gods want little to do with humanity; or the <em>Percy Jackson</em> series (Riordan, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Sources of Magic within the Sample of Young Adult and Middle Grade Children’s Novels

In the case of Rick Riordan’s the Kane Chronicles, the Egyptian gods are cited as being the source of modern magic in the first novel, *The Red Pyramid* (2010a). Uncle Amos informs his niece and nephew, Sadie and Carter Kane:

“The Egyptians would not have been stupid enough to believe in imaginary gods. The beings they described in their myths are very, very real. In the old days, the
priests of Egypt would call upon these gods to channel their power and perform
great feats. That is the origin of what we now call magic. Like many things,
magic was first invented by the Egyptians.” (p. 72)

Amos elaborates about the presence of Egyptian magic in the present-day world of the
novel, stating:

“You see, as Egypt faded, its magic collected and concentrated into its remaining
relics. Most of these, of course, are still in Egypt. But you can find some in
almost every major museum. A magician can use these artifacts as focal points to
work more powerful spells.” (p. 75)

As an explanation for the origin of magic and the way it survives within the present-day
world of the novel, this implies that magic may be found in the world where remnants of
ancient Egyptian culture still exist; particularly in monuments, museums and in other
mementos or relics of the past.

When dealing specifically with the presence of traditional gods in a modern
setting within the sample of novels I analyzed, most of the stories connected the
continuing existence of the gods to a sense of remembering them within the world of the
story. In the young adult novel Thief Eyes (Simner, 2010), the protagonist Haley must
perform a ritual to undo a spell that has been placed on the women in her family and that
threatens the world. A portion of the ritual involves making an offering by killing a fox.
A mythic figure from Norse myth, Freki the fox offers himself as the sacrifice. He
informs Haley, “I cannot die. I will only leave this world for a time, nothing more” (p.
215). He goes on to mention, “It is different for humans, I know…If you leave this
world, you leave it forever, and there are those who would miss you if you did.” Even
after Freki draws Haley’s attention to the fact that the human experience of death is different from the one of a mythic figure, Haley is still reluctant to perform the ritual. She asks:

“You swear you’ll come back?” I asked Freki. “Eventually?”

“You have my word.” The little fox glanced toward Muninn [a crow and fellow creature of the Norse god Odin]. “So long as you remember me in this world, I will return to it.”

My throat hurt. “Of course I’ll remember you.” (pp. 216-217)

It is through remembering myth, its gods, goddesses, monsters and stories that it survives. It is what provides the mythic figures with the magic to remain alive. The young adult and middle grade children’s novels within this sample serve as reminders of these figures as well, to keep these characters alive in the reader’s imagination.

In the Gods of Manhattan series by Scott Mebus (2008, 2009, 2010), the gods, who in contrast to the rest of the novels in this sample are American and Native American historical figures and spirits, also derive their power from memory—Not only from the memories of the characters, but from the memory of the land. One of the Munsee spirits notes about their spirits’ power, “Their people’s powers came from the land itself,” (2009, p. 214), reinforcing the connection some of these mythic belief systems have to the land or the country of their origin.

While the origins of the magic usually involves remembering the past, none of the young adult or middle grade children’s novels in my sample presented human belief as the sole or paramount source of magic. Most of the novels avoided directly addressing issues of belief. Rather, protagonists faced choices between logic and magic.
Revisiting Mythos and Logos as Explanations of Experience

Myth still is used to explain reality and the world people experience. Allan Guggenbühl, a psychologist, defines myth:

Myths are defined as the distinct stories which emerge in societies in order to explain mysteries, problems, fears and threats. We lean on myths when we are existentially challenged and in need of answers. They help us make decisions and give us an orientation. (2008, p. 65)

This explanation of myth expands its realm to allow science, religion, logic, philosophy etc. to all function as potential mythic systems, worldviews or paradigms for people to live by and deal with daily problems and challenges. Similarly, Maurice Saxby describes in more detail the way myth emerges within a culture:

For myth grows out of the need to form hypotheses and create explanations for natural phenomena: how the world came into being; the formation of rivers, lakes, mountains and other geographical features; why spring always follows winter just as the dawn always rises to herald the new day that will end with sunset. More than that, it seeks to explain what lies beyond the dawn and sunset, beyond the edge of vision, beyond the immediately observable and knowable: what worlds, celestial kingdoms or nether regions exist beyond the horizon, above the sky or beneath the earth. (1996, p. 166)

This description has a “scientific” and religious slant, indicating that myth is serving the same purpose as religion and science as ways of understanding the world.
These reconceptualizations may be applied to the concepts of *mythos* and its counterpart *logos*, story and logic, which I initially described in Chapter One with Plato’s conception of the realm of myth within his Republic. Raya A. Jones describes the “creative mythos” or “utterances of the heart” and the “critical logos” or “discriminating intellect” as still being a distinction in Western culture (2008, p. 92; Clarkson, 2008, p. 137). Jones cautions against dichotomizing logos and mythos as being “either/or”. Instead she calls for viewing “both these modes of conception [logos and mythos] as fundamental and irreducible to each other, like sides of a coin” (pp. 92-93) (Table 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example Realms associated with*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mythos</td>
<td>Story</td>
<td>Historically words of power or truth, now associated with antidotes or untruth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logos</td>
<td>Logic</td>
<td>Science and argument; has become associated with truth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Such meanings always have the potential to shift and changes

Table 11: The Realms of Mythos and Logos (Adapted from the works of Jones, 2008; Lincoln, 1999)

Providing examples of both mythos and logos is sometimes recommended when trying to explain the world to children: For example, *The Babysitter’s Survival Guide* (Chassé, 2010) provides practical information to middle grade and young adult readers on how to obtain babysitting jobs and how to interact with the children they will be watching and their parents appropriately. Jill D. Chassé recommends that if a child is upset by
stormy weather:

Read some mythological tales about storms, like “Zeus and the Lightning,” explain why it rains from a scientific point of view, or tell a story about magical winds and miraculous thunderclaps. Whether the story is fiction or nonfiction, story time can help ease a child’s fears and redirect his attention. (pp. 99-100)

Or in other words, provide the child both with the opportunity to hear a factual argument about the cause of a storm and a myth-based story, logos and mythos.

In Karen Healey’s *Guardian of the Dead* (2010), when the protagonist, Ellie, is faced with the realization that logos or logic cannot explain all of her recent experiences, including a classmate named Mark altering her memory, she quickly concludes that there is another explanation for her experience. Ellie narrates, that “Mark had done something to me, and I couldn’t come up with a logical explanation. So I went with the illogical one. Magic. Magic was real” (p. 91, emphasis present in text). Faced with seemingly only two alternatives, Ellie chooses mythos, story and magic to explain her experience; to believe in. Logic failing to explain the protagonists’ experiences is a common motif throughout my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels and in the fantasy genre.

Tzvetan Todorov (1975) explores this motif or aspect in fantasy literature. He refers to the hesitation the reader and character may feel over trying to explain an experience or of questioning their reality:

The text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a
character; thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work.

(p. 33)

Most of the protagonists within my sample experience this moment of hesitation. They usually commit to the experience of magic, myth or story instead of to logic, lending to a sense of dichotomy that Jones cautioned against.

Although not an official part of my sample, in the first young adult novel, Prom Dates from Hell (2007), of the Maggie Quinn: Girl Vs. Evil series (2007, 2008, 2009) by Rosemary Clement-Moore, the protagonist, seventeen-year-old Maggie, is a high school newspaper journalist who hopes to win a Pulitzer Prize in journalism (p. 17). She investigates the strange supernatural events at her high school and her own prophetic dreams while trying to maintain a logical and scientific approach to her research. She argues with Justin, a college student who has been researching the occult. He criticizes the fact that when they began working together, Maggie’s knowledge of the supernatural was limited to her knowledge of the Ghostbusters movies (Brillstein & Reitman, 1984; Brillstein & Reitman, 1989). She is also angry that he has no first-hand experience with investigating the occult:

“I thought you knew what you were doing.”

He threw the chicken finger into the basket. “It isn’t as if I made this stuff up. It may be secondhand knowledge, but at least I’m not basing it on Bill Murray movies.”

“That was just a starting place!” Indignant, I forgot about whispering. “I have been as logical and methodical as I can, under some pretty extraordinary
circumstances.”

He waved a hand in frustration. “You’re trying to force this thing to fit in a real-world box, but you won’t even fully admit it exists.”

The truth that didn’t make it any easier to swallow. “At least I admit I don’t know what I’m dealing with.”

His eyes hardened to chips of stone. “At least I’m willing to commit to my hypothesis without closing my mind to the more unpleasant possibilities.”

That stung. “Closed” and “minded” were fighting words for me, and I struck back below the belt. “Yeah, but you tested your hypothesis on me. Some paladin you are.” (Clement-Moore, 2007, pp. 176-177)

While maintaining a scientific approach as they seek out a demon, Justin is angry that Maggie will not completely commit to the supernatural nature of the problem at her school. Nonetheless, as a character interested in investigative journalism who also has prophetic dreams and intuitions, Maggie is an attempt to balance both logos and mythos together, both side of Jones’s coin.

The Many Truths of an Explanation

Looking beyond a potential dichotomy between mythos and logos, it seems the preferred method to re-present myths in young adult and middle grade children’s literature is to focus on the myth and characters of myth’s symbolic meaning or to ignore their past religious significance. However, another way of addressing the truthfulness of myth is to accept multiple truths or to allow for many interpretations. David Bidney
writes, “The “truth” of myth is a purely subjective, psychological truth and expresses how reality appears in terms of our human feeling-qualities. In this sense myth is real, just as every psychological experience is real to the subject” (1972, p. 12). If people emotionally or psychologically engage with traditional, re-presented or new myth, then during that experience, myth is real for them. But what are the implications for this about reality? Berger and Luckmann (1966) define reality as “quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition (we cannot “wish them away”)” (p. 1). But such phenomena are still open to interpretation.

This is often true in the novels in the sample. Characters have a choice about which truths to believe of their experiences and the stories they encounter based on their interpretations, demonstrating that reality—if ever truly discernable is subjective and interpreted to make meaning. In *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010), the concept of the “mists” as a mythic realm where time and space operate differently also includes the property that a person’s own beliefs influence how they perceive the space (for more on this concept see Chapter Three). One of the characters, Mark, notes that his mortal father who is Christian, was taken into the mythic realm of the mists by a fairy who wanted to procreate with him. Mark’s father was taken from Christchurch, New Zealand during the 1940s and his experiences in the mists drove him crazy. Mark explains:

“They [the mists] weren’t a good place for a Pākehā-raised [European or non-Māori] Christian boy who didn’t believe in magic. He was more than half-mad by the time she [the fairy] was pregnant [with Mark]. Then she brought him back, and finding out how much time had passed did the rest. It was the mid-sixties, and he still looked nineteen. His parents were dead. His brother was in his fifties.
I think Dad thought he’d been in hell. Trapped by a demon.” (p. 142).

While the mythology that the mists are drawn from are those of the Māori people in New Zealand, Mark’s father’s own religious beliefs caused him to interpret his experience differently, as if he were in Hell. In this example, multiple explanations can all give different significance to one experience. *Guardian of the Dead* is one of the few novels within my sample which positions traditional myth and popularly-believed religions as equal in terms of how characters use such stories to construct their understanding of their world and experiences.

**When a Paradigm or Worldview Fails**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) write that, “everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world” (p. 19). A common theme throughout the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels is that the protagonists’ experiences can no longer be explained by the paradigm or way they are used to understanding the everyday world or when a sense of “coherence” (Wortham, 2001, p. 141) is lost. Todorov discusses this experience:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one or two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—
but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (1975, p. 25)

It is this uncertainty, this hesitation, this possibility of the fantastic being real and that allows a person to consider a worldview different from the one they have previously relied upon.

In *The Immortal Fire* (2009), the final novel in Ursu’s Cronus Chronicles (2006, 2007, 2009), Greek gods and monsters have ceased hiding themselves from humans and characters like eighth grader Charlotte Mielswetzski’s mother, who does not know that the Greek myths are real. She does not know how to explain the strange occurrences and unusual weather that is being reported on the news. Charlotte notes her mother’s reaction to the new: “There was an odd expression on Charlotte’s mom’s face—wonder and disbelief, as if she was realizing the world was not quite the place she thought it was. Which, of course, it wasn’t” (2009, p. 32). Charlotte, who knows the Greek gods and monsters are behind the strange occurrences, continues to wonder what her mother must be experiencing:

Charlotte could not imagine what her mother was thinking. She must be scared. She had caught on somehow—not the truth, of course, but she knew something was horribly wrong. The things that were happening should not be happening—they were impossible. Any one of them would be frightened enough on its own, but together…

Was it scarier, Charlotte wondered, to see all this happen and know the cause, or to wonder at the dark? She was terrified for very real reasons; Mrs. Mielswetzski and everyone else watching were scared of the terrors that lurked in the vast unknown. Would it be better, in a way, if they knew? (p. 35)
Mrs. Mielswetzski is experiencing uncertainty and hesitation over how to explain the events she is witnessing. Her current worldview has failed her and Charlotte wonders if knowing the truth about the world is any better.

As opposed to unusual occurrences on a grand environmental scale, Cameron’s crisis of worldview in *Going Bovine* (Bray, 2009) is more personal. When Cameron is first diagnosed with mad cow disease, he deals with the reality that his death is eminent. He considers the stories that explain what will happen to him:

What happens to us when we die: an informal poll.

Theory #1: The Christians are right. There’s a big guy with a white robe and a long, flowing beard and a devil with a pitchfork, and depending on whether you’ve been bad or good (oh, be good, for goodness’ sake!), you’ll wind up playing a harp with the angels or burning in the everlasting fires of hell, both of which sound sucktastic.

Theory #2: The Jews are right, and when you die there’s nothing, so you better have gotten plenty to eat in this life.

Theory #3: The Muslims are right, and I am in for some serious black-eyed virgin time. Then again, I’ve got black eyes and am a virgin, so I may be in for some serious trouble once I kick.

Theory #4: The Buddhists and Hindus are right. This life is one of many. You just go on working through your karmic baggage till you get it right. So be nice to that cockroach. That could be you someday.

Theory #5: The UFO crazies are right, and we are all one big experiment for a race of superaliens who like to sit around in the alien equivalent of the
Barcalounger, sipping a brew and watching those wacky humans get up to the nuttiest sorts of hijinks. And when we buy the farm, they swoop down in the mother ship and take us back to Planet Z and the primordial ooze.

Theory #6: Nobody knows shit.

This is just one of the many nifty lists I’ve been making up over the weekend since I got my diagnosis and entered it into that devil’s playground, the Internet.

Turns out I’m in for a fun ride. (pp. 84-85)

This uncertainty over what will happen to him after he dies understandably disturbs Cameron. After his admittance to the hospital, he essentially begins his own myth, a quest and road trip to save the world and prevent his death to help give his life, illness, inevitable death and other experiences meaning.

More common, when faced with this tension over uncertainty of belief or a lack of explanation, many of the protagonists in my sample questioned whether they had been exposed to drugs, whether they were dreaming or whether they had gone insane. In *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005), when Percy sees his teacher transform into a monster, he assumes “My lunch must’ve been contaminated with magic mushrooms or something” (p. 14). Likewise, when Morgan finds herself in a “long ago” time, with magically long hair and a horse who can speak, while on a bicycling trip through Ireland in *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* (Wood, 2007), she exclaims, “‘Fek me!’ I yelled. ‘Look at my hair!’” And then I shut up, because now I knew I must be dreaming’ (p. 59, emphasis present in text). Rory, in *Gods of Manhattan* (Mebus, 2008), questions his sanity after a sorcerer, Hex, performs a real act of magic at his sister’s birthday party and Rory is left feeling that the feat of magic smacked “him off his nice, predictable path into an unknown world he
knew did not exist. It couldn’t exist. He wouldn’t let it” (p. 9). Faced with a trick he cannot explain, Rory begins to see creatures of the mythic realm, Mannahatta, including a waving cockroach riding a rat like it is a pony (p. 11) and does not react well to having his preferred conception of reality challenged:

Rory didn’t know what to do. He was cracking up, obviously. That magician [Hex.] had broken his mind. But he refused to give in to the hallucination. He was in control here, and he knew what could be real. So without changing expression, he slowly looked away [from the cockroach]. He kept his eyes frozen on the apartment building next door, the one with the gargoyles on the roof. They stared out into nothingness, never moving, never changing. He could rely on them. (p. 11)

When Rory’s understanding of reality is challenged and he feels Todorov’s moment of hesitation, he tries to cling to what he thinks of as true. In Rory’s case this proves ineffective, because a few moments later he witnesses one of the stone gargoyles come alive and eat a pigeon (p. 12). Faced with more and more evidence that there is more to the world than he has understood, Rory must rely on a new myth, religion or hypothesis to explain his experiences: that magic, gods and spirits exist and that they influence the world he has always known. He becomes the boy who must balance between two worlds.

No matter which explanation is preferred or relied upon to make meaning of experience, these paradigms, myths, religions and stories prevent chaos. They give people answers to the difficult “Why?” questions that saturate life and the world. The threat of chaos is presented in Esther Friesner’s Temping Fate (2006). The protagonist,
Ilana, her friend Heather and several of the temps at the Divine Relief Temp agency discuss the threat of chaos with their boss, Ratatosk, a Norse mythic figure:

“This is what myths do. We stand guard over Chaos.”

“I thought your main job was explaining things,” Ilana said. “You know, like What makes the seasons change? Or What causes lightning? Or Why is the world a mess?”

“That’s part of it,” said Ratatosk. “Myths help keep the forces of the cosmos in balance; we let you see them in perspective. We are stories, and stories have endings. When you mortals face small tastes of Chaos, like floods or fires or epidemics or wars, just knowing that it all has to end sometime can save you from feeling completely helpless.” (p. 233-234, emphasis present in text)

Myths and other paradigms help characters make sense of and keep the chaos they experience in perspective. In Ratatosk’s argument, knowing about an ending—or death—may be a comfort. But, when a preferred paradigm fails a character, or if a character—like Cameron in *Going Bovine* (Bray, 2007)—was never certain of any paradigm or explanation of the world or death, he is left with chaos and must find a new way to explain the experience or come to terms with chaos. (But then acknowledging chaos or the meaningless confusion of the world may also be another worldview or a way of explaining reality.)

**Present-Day Belief and Mythic Figures**

Riordan’s *The Lightning Thief* (2005) avoids addressing its potential issues of
truthfulness and religious significance. Through conversation, the adult characters attempt to explain to Percy that questions over the gods of myth and the God of Christianity, Judaism and Islam belong to different realms of thought:

“Wait,” I told Chiron. “You’re telling me there’s such a thing as God.”

“Well, now,” Chiron said. “God—capital G, God. That’s a different matter altogether.

We shan’t deal with the metaphysical.”

“Metaphysical? But you were just talking about—”

“Ah, gods, plural, as in, great beings that control the forces of nature and human endeavors: the immortal gods of Olympus. That’s a smaller matter.”

“Smaller?”

“Yes, quite. The gods we discussed in Latin class.”


And there it was again—distant thunder on a cloudless day.

“Young man,” said Mr. D, “I would really be less casual about throwing those names around, if I were you.” (p. 67)

Chiron, Percy’s teacher, and Mr. D, the camp director, attempt to place the gods of myth into the realm of immediate influence and place the Judeo-Christian God in the realm of the metaphysical, an area the characters do not wish to address. This is a way of attempting to separate the novel from declaring myth as either truth or falsehood or a matter of religion.

Soon after that, Percy Jackson also addresses a scientific understanding of the world to help position it and myth within a long-term perspective of views of the world:
“Science!” Mr. D scoffed. “And tell me, Perseus Jackson”—I flinched when he said my real name, which I never told anybody—“what will people think of your ‘science’ two thousand years from now?” Mr. D continued. “Hmm? They will call it primitive mumbo jumbo. That’s what. Oh, I love mortals—they have absolutely no sense of perspective. They think they’ve come so-o-o far.” (p. 68, emphasis present in text)

The camp director, Mr. D, actually calls the idea of scientific truth into question, possibly leaving the reader with no clear answer of what is truth within the text beyond the story of Percy’s experiences with the Greek mythic figures. This leaves the reader with the possibility of viewing myth as real and avoiding its positioning in relation to religion, a bigger metaphysical question.

Why are the myths of only certain cultures played with and re-presented in young adult and middle grade children’s literature? Most readers seem willing to imagine the humanized gods of Ancient Greece, Egyptian or Iceland included in modern settings, but it is difficult to find fictional children’s novels that include God, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, Ganesh or other prophets described in texts held to be sacred today as characters. Can only those myths and figures that have gone from being in the realm of faith to the realm of the secular be re-authored? David Leeming has argued that religions are reluctant to change. He writes:

The problem facing religions is not only the perversion of existing myths and traditions but the repression of new revelations. With the exception of some forward-looking factions, religions around the world today all too often not only still claim to be the sole repositories of eternal truth but repress or resist the
messages of the myths that are emerging in our time. Religions are said to be timeless, by which too many religious people often really mean unchanging. Individuals grow, cultures develop, knowledge and horizons are expanded, but institutionalized religions often resist development, failing to realize that it is not the religious system or the culture it represents that is sacrosanct but the continuing growth in human consciousness it should be nurturing. (2002, pp. 20-21)

While all may not agree with Leeming’s argument, if the contemporary religions are not being re-presented because they are sacred or resistant to change, then the overall lack of appearance of mythic figures from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, etc. makes sense since the inclusion and re-presentation of mythic figures is inherently different from their traditional presentations when incorporated into modern contexts. (I must note that while mythic figures of contemporary religions are excluded, my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels do include some characters who assume a Judeo-Christian worldview.)

Although not directly addressed by Leeming, some religions may be resistant to change, they also historically discouraged the belief in other faiths. This issue is addressed in Kate Thompson’s The New Policeman trilogy (2007, 2008, 2010), which is set in Ireland and explores belief in fairies and other Irish folk traditions. The protagonist, J.J. Liddy, discusses his family’s history as musicians with his mother, Helen. She notes that the Catholic church discouraged the dances and music the Liddy family was famous for:

“There were older, more primitive beliefs in Ireland that went back even further
than the Church. They went back thousands, not hundreds of years. In some small ways they’re still with us today.”

“Like what?” said J.J.

“The fairy folk,” said Helen, “and all the stories and superstitions that surrounded them.”

“But that’s not still with us,” said J.J. “Nobody believes in any of that these days.”

Helen shrugged. “Maybe not.” (2007, pp. 81-82)

Helen goes on to ask J.J. about fairy forts, circles of stones or historic monuments that fairies supposedly passed through to enter different realms. She asks if J.J. would one day tear down the one on their own property. J.J. admits that he would not, but that people who believed in fairies were “crazy” (p. 83). Helen responds:

“Maybe,” said Helen. “Maybe not. In any event, the priests were of your opinion. It was more than crazy, according to them. It was dangerous and subversive. But they couldn’t knock those old beliefs out of people, no matter how hard they tried or what hellfire they threatened them with. The fairies and the country people just went too far back together.” (p. 83)

Traditional paradigms are deeply held beliefs that, as this study demonstrates, survive and influence understandings of the world today despite attempts to convert people to other paradigms.

Nonetheless, very few children’s novels within my sample included mythic figures from the most commonly practiced religions as characters in the modern world. Although not formally a part of my sample since the novel is historical fiction, Guus
Kuijer’s *The Book of Everything* (2006) is the only novel I could find that included Jesus as a character in a story set in the Netherlands in 1951. When nine-year-old Thomas, the protagonist, is upset by his father’s physical abuse of his mother, he sees Jesus in visions. In Thomas’s first conversation with Jesus, the god informs him, “I’ll never let myself be nailed to the Cross again, I just won’t. I’ve had enough of it” (p. 19). Jesus’ comment inspires Thomas to work to show his father that his treatment of his wife, Thomas and his sister, Margot, is wrong. Thomas decides to reenact several of the plagues of Ancient Egypt, depicted in the Old Testament book of Exodus, on a small scale (such as turning the water of the family fish tank red by adding cordial (p. 40) to represent the water of the Nile River turning to blood) to show his disapproval over his father’s actions. Thomas’s conversations with Jesus serve as a coping mechanism for dealing with his abusive father and help him overcome his feeling of victimization and his crisis of faith.

In one scene, Thomas discusses his father’s religious and abusive nature with Jesus as the family prays around the table. Thomas’s father has just discovered a letter, stating, “A man who hits his wife dishonors himself” (p. 74) in the family Bible. Thomas’s father demands to know who left the letter for him to find:

“Almighty God,” [Father] said. “See our plight. Help this family to be strong in this time of great temptation….”

Thomas closed his eyes. The sky turned clear blue and sand blew around his ears.

“Jesus?” he asked. But Jesus was nowhere to be seen.

“I’m here,” said Jesus.

“Where?” said Thomas. “I can’t see you.”

“That’s pretty obvious,” said Jesus. “You’ve got your eyes shut.”
Thomas opened his eyes. Jesus stood in the room, in front of the chimney-piece with the copper geckoes. He looked at the praying man [Thomas’s father].

“So that’s him?” asked Jesus.

“Yes,” said Thomas.

“He means well, I think,” said Jesus. “But he is afraid. He is really a coward, if you ask me.”

“I don’t know,” said Thomas.

“He hides like a scared child behind God’s broad back,” said Jesus.

But Thomas thought, “How can you hide behind the back of someone who is no longer there?”

“I have to tell you something,” he said.

“Go on then,” said Jesus.

“God the Father is not just not here,” said Thomas. “He has died. I’m telling You honestly.”

Jesus was stunned, and for a moment He was speechless. “You really mean it!” he exclaimed.

Thomas nodded. He thought it was sad for the Lord Jesus, but the truth had to be stated.

“But how did this happen?” Jesus cried.

“He was beaten out of me,” said Thomas. “And then He died, for He could not do without me.”

Jesus had to think about that. Then He nodded and smiled sadly. Of course, that was how it had been. Without Thomas, nothing could exist.
“We pray for this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, amen,” Father said. Jesus waved to Thomas and faded. Thomas waved back.

“What are you doing?” Father asked.

“I was waving,” said Thomas.

“What for?”

“I saw Jesus,” said Thomas.

“Margot [his sister] giggled and Mother laid her arm on Thomas’s shoulder in fear. (pp. 75-76)

Thomas’s crisis of faith over the existence of God the Father is triggered by the dark reality he must face of how his own father treats his family. Thomas’s belief in Jesus, the Son of God, is unwavering, as he sees him with his own eyes or in his mind. Thomas reacts as though Jesus is truly present in the room by waving goodbye to him. His father’s confusion demonstrates that Thomas is the only one able to see him. The mention that “Without Thomas, nothing could exist” (p. 76) reinforces that the reality being presented is Thomas’s. This is his understanding of the world, his experience of family and of Jesus. Without him to perceive the world, there is no world. This was the only children’s novel that I could find that incorporated Jesus into a twentieth-century realistic landscape.

Many young adult and middle grade novels, however, include discussion of religious issues. The novel Repossessed (Jenkins, 2007) is the story of Kiriel, a demon escaped from Hell who possesses the body of a teenage boy, Shaun, right as the mortal Shaun was about to die in a traffic accident. The young adult novel explores the concept of God and the deity’s role in the universe. More than anything, Kiriel seeks to have a
relationship with God, to know if the “Creator,” as he is most commonly called, is angry with him as one of the Fallen who questioned his place in the world. Kiriel, a demon of the author A.M. Jenkins’s invention, describes himself in comparison to angels:

I don’t like the term “demon.” It carries quite a bit of negativity with it. It implies a pointy tail and cloven hooves. I prefer the term “fallen angel.” That is, indeed, what we are. The difference between us and the angels who didn’t fall from grace is that the Unfallen were, are, and always will be faithful, stalwart, and obedient. That is their nature, just as it is their nature to rejoice in worship and contemplation of the vastness of the Creator’s perfection. We, the Fallen, wondered, questioned, confronted, eventually demanded, and in general pushed the edges of the envelope till the envelope burst.

Since the Creator knows all in the vastness of time, you may ask yourself whether we the Fallen are merely carrying out our part in His plan. That is a question. Good luck getting an answer. His thoughts, His ultimate designs are mysteries. Except to—maybe—the Unfallen. I’ve never been sure about that, because the Unfallen don’t hang out with us peons much anymore. (pp. 9-10, emphasis present in text).

Kiriel’s question about the Creator’s plan and his place within that worldview is existential and one that many Muslims, Christians, Jews and other religious believers can relate to: If God’s creatures are designed by their creator to be curious as a part of God’s plan for them, how can they be faulted for questioning God and His laws. Kiriel never receives answers to his questions.

When the fact that Kiriel took over Shaun’s body becomes known, an angel, or an
Unfallen, named Hanael, meets Kiriel to end the Fallen’s vacation in the boy’s body.

Kiriel attempts to get answers from Hanael:

“Is the Creator angry with me?” Hope springs eternal in a Fallen’s breast.

“I am not an intermediary between you and the Creator.”

“I’m just asking a question.”

“My function does not involve answering that question.”

“That’s my punishment, isn’t it? I am Fallen, and so I’ll never get the one thing I crave most—answers. But you, Hanael, you have all the answers, even though you never asked for them or even wanted them. It just doesn’t seem right.”

“All is right with the Creator.”

“Yeah, well, you would think so. You’re the Creator’s pet, and I’m the guy in the corner with the dunce cap.” (p. 212, emphasis present in text)

Because Kiriel desires answers, he will never receive them. As a reader, I was disappointed by the ending of *Repossessed*. I wanted the Creator to acknowledge his creation, to answer Kiriel for the way the world and its inhabitants are designed. While *Repossessed* plays with tensions that are key to belief in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic God, the Creator himself never appears in the story. Neither do any angels or mythic figures named in the Bible, Torah or Koran. Central concerns of faith are raised but no mythic figures answer. The author, Jenkins, avoids playing with the mythic figures of a contemporary religion too extensively. He raises questions of faith, but does not include mythic figures to answer them.
Angels.

Another way the mythic figures of Judaism, Islam and Christianity have entered into mainstream young adult literature is through the paranormal romance publishing trend popular in the late 2000s. A number of young adult novels and series have been published sharing paranormal romances between angels and teenagers. *Halo* (2010) by Alexandra Adornetto, *The Dark Divine* (2010) by Bree Despain, the *Fallen* series (2009, 2010) by Lauren Kate and the *Hush, Hush* series (2009, 2010) by Becca Fitzpatrick all deal with angels or the children of fallen angels living in a present-day Western culture, usually within the United States of America, and conducting themselves as teenagers or interacting with them.

Generally, the inclusion of angels involves the author’s invented characters taking up some dimensions and mythic creatures’ titles from a mythic tradition with no actual mythic figures from the traditional myths included and with little regard for the history of the figures. This is also common within other folkloric traditions. For example, young adult author Stephenie Meyer with her *Twilight Saga* (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) has created her own version of were-animals and vampires with little or no referencing to the historical context or folkloric traditions, sometimes completely ignoring traditional accounts of the creatures. Carrie Jones with her *Need* series (2009, 2010a, 2010b) seems to be doing this as well with her account of were-animals and pixies. It is only in the second and third novels of the series, *Captivate* (2010a) and *Entice* (2010b) that the narrative links itself to and leans upon Norse mythology. The inclusion of a Valkyrie, Valhalla, the hypothesis that pixies are “replicated from Odin” in the way that “Adam
was made in the image of God” (2010b, p. 19) and of the potential end of the world lend mythic weight to what may otherwise be a series that depicts a teenage girl, Zara, struggling with identity issues, the loss of her stepfather, the experience of heterosexual love and with the nature of good, evil and bigotry.

But in the specific mythic case of angels, a scholar and the author of *Angels: A History* (2010) David Albert Jones notes that angels have often taken on different meanings in different times and cultures:

Angels have taken different forms in different times and places. They have carried different cultural meanings. Nevertheless there are recurrent patterns. Angels are liminal figures at the threshold between the visible and the invisible worlds.

…Images and ideas about angels have moved easily between different religions and into contemporary culture. This is another reason why Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have sometimes been ambivalent about them. Angels do not stay safely in the confines of any one religion. Talk of angels has always flourished more in folk culture than in official categories. They help illuminate the limitedness of those categories and teach us to be suspicious of easy rationalism, whether of a secular or of a religious kind. The world is not tidy, and it is neither fruitful nor honest to tidy it up artificially. Angels help show up the mystery of it all.

The elusive character of angels helps explain why they remain popular in an age that finds faith difficult. (pp. 138-139)

Not as weighted in religious belief as other mythic figures may be, authors are playing
with angels as romantic characters in young adult novels.

Becca Fitzpatrick’s young adult paranormal romance *Hush, Hush* (2009) and its sequel *Crescendo* (2010), are examples within this sub-genre. In the Hush, Hush series, tenth-grader Nora Grey begins to suspect that Patch, a mysterious loner new to Nora’s school in Coldwater, Maine, may be a fallen angel after seeing that he has scars on his back and recognizing similar scars on the back of a fallen angel on paintings beside a rollercoaster called the Archangel:

In my mind I switched back and forth between the painting of the angel’s scars and Patch’s scars. Both scars had healed to the color of black licorice, both ran from the shoulder blades to the kidneys, and both curved out as they traveled the length of the back. I told myself there was a good chance it was merely a very creepy coincidence that the paintings on the Archangel depicted Patch’s scars perfectly. I told myself a lot of things could cause scars like Patch’s. Gang fight, prison scars, skid marks—just like Vee [Nora’s best friend] said. Unfortunately, all the excuses felt like lies. Like the truth was staring me in the face, but I wasn’t brave enough to look back.

“Was he an angel?” (2009, p. 249)

Nora considers other explanations for Patch’s scars, but is frightened by the realization that the possibility that Patch is a fallen angel seems like the truth.

Despite Nora’s eventual commitment to this belief, questions of religious belief in God and angels are never truly raised. At one point, Nora does ask her best friend Vee about her religious belief:

“When was the last time you went to church?” I asked.
I heard [Vee] pop a gum bubble. “Sunday.”

“Do you think the Bible is accurate? I mean, do you think it’s real?”

“I think Pastor Calvin is hot. In a fortysomething way. That pretty much sums up my religious conviction.” (p. 253)

Although Nora questions her best friend’s religious faith, Nora’s own religious faith is never really explored and the existence of angels is never really justified or positioned within the larger dialogue of faith, belief, memory, metaphysics, etc., the way that the other mythic figures’ inclusions are explained in some of the other novels in my sample. Also missing is any real discussion of the Judeo-Christian God. The fallen angels’ rebellions are not even for religious reasons, rather Nora learns about fallen angels on a website:

Some angels set their sights on the world beyond the garden [of Eden’s] walls. They saw themselves as future rulers over the Earth’s population, lusting after power money, and even human women. Together they tempted and convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, opening the gates guarding Eden. As punishment for this grave sin and for deserting their duties, God stripped the angels’ wings and banished them to Earth forever. (pp. 250-251)

While this does alter the specifics of the origin story within the Old Testament, in place of rebellion against God, the angels are simply tempted by aspects of the human experience—thirst for power or sexual love.

This is true in Patch’s case. He chose to give up his angel wings for a woman. He tells Nora:
“The first time I saw her, [the girl] I was still an angel. It was an instant, possessive lust. It drove me crazy. I didn’t know anything about her, except that I would do whatever it took to get close to her. I watched her for a while, and then I got it in my head that if I went down to Earth and possessed a human body, I would be cast out of heaven and become human. The thing is, I didn’t know about Cheshvan [the Hebrew month when fallen angels could possess human bodies (p. 251)]. I came down on a night in August, but I couldn’t possess a body. On my way back to heaven, a host of avenging angels stopped me and ripped out my wings. They tossed me out of the sky. Right away I knew something was wrong. When I looked at humans, all I could feel was an insatiable craving to be inside their bodies. All my powers were stripped, and I was this weak, pathetic thing. I wasn’t human. I was fallen. I’d realized I’d given it all up, just like that. All this time I’ve hated myself for it.” (p. 338)

The concept of Cheshvan or “the bitter month” as being a time for fallen angels to inhabit human bodies plays with contemporary Jewish faith. Traditionally, Cheshvan, which falls in October and November, is referred to as the “bitter” month because it is the only month without a holiday (Blech, 2003, 134-135).

Despite Patch’s comments to Nora, he is not completely stripped of his powers. All of the fallen angels have the power to put words in humans’ heads and to “put images—very real images—there” (p. 302). Throughout *Hush, Hush*, Nora experiences traumatic events that suddenly are undone or that seem to correct themselves: She feels she is falling off a roller coaster and the security features have failed only to discover at the end of the ride that her safety belt has been in place the entire time; she hits a masked
person with a car while driving, but after several minutes the car is no longer dented from
the impact and the masked person has disappeared; and her room appears to have been
vandalized and searched only to seem orderly again after the police have arrived to
investigate. These moments challenge reality as Nora understands it. Patch, a fallen
angel and her love interest, informs her:

“I put the words and images there, but it’s up to you if you believe them. It’s a
riddle. The images overlap reality, and you have to figure out which is real.”

“Is this a special angel power?”

He shook his head. “ Fallen angel power. Any other kind of angel wouldn’t
invade your privacy, even though they can.” (p. 302)

This passage presents the idea that there is one reality, a true reality, but that people may
still perceive other options and that they choose what to believe. Although Nora does not
face a choice over whether or not to have faith in religion, she still must make choices
over whether to believe what she perceives to be right in front of her.

This challenge to perception and to one reality is also explored in the second
novel of the series, Crescendo (2010). Nora is haunted by dreams of the past and of her
now ex-boyfriend Patch. In one such dream, she begins to realize that Patch has used his
powers as an angel to actually enter her dream. Realizing that she is in a dream and that
she is seeing everything in black and white, she wonders, “But was I dreaming about
him, or did he actually know he was here? Were we sharing the same dream?” (p. 178,
emphasis present in text). In the dream, the two argue and Nora tears off a necklace
Patch had given her. When she wakes from the dream, Nora is surprised to realize that
the necklace is really gone, as she had dreamed. She narrates:
I opened my eyes.

I clicked on the lamp, my vision returning to full color. I sat up, a hot flash of adrenaline warming my skin. Reaching for my neck, I felt for Patch’s silver chain, but it wasn’t there. I swept my hand across the wrinkled sheets, thinking it had fallen off while I slept.

But the chain was gone.

The dream was real.

Patch had discovered a way to visit me while I slept. (p.188)

In contrast to the first novel in the series, instead of there only being one reality with other possibilities of belief or perception, now the events that occur within the space and time of a dream may also be considered real. The dreams may be interpreted as a reality Patch and Nora have socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Together, the characters make the shared dream real through their language about it and their belief in it. Instead of challenging or exploring religious belief, the Hush, Hush series challenges ways of perceiving reality and offers an alternative socially constructed dream reality between Nora and Patch that is theirs alone.

**Re-Presenting Reality**

Fitzpatrick’s Hush, Hush series (2009, 2010) falls within the realm of fantasy and is classified as “paranormal romance” as it presents a character attempting to choose between illusion and reality and making her own reality. In contrast, Libba Bray’s Printz Award winning *Going Bovine* (2009) is an exception to the trend of classifying novels
that re-present and include mythic figures as fantasy. In *Going Bovine*, after sixteen-year-old Cameron Smith is diagnosed and hospitalized with mad cow disease, he receives a mission from a messenger angel named Dulcie, of the author’s own creation, to “save the world from complete destruction” (p. 119) and to find a scientist, Dr. X, who has a cure for Cameron. On his quest, which leads him to Disney World, Cameron meets the Norse god Balder, who is re-presented as a yard gnome and accompanies Cameron on a part of his journey. At their first meeting, Balder identifies himself as the Norse god and asserts that his interaction with Cameron is very real:

“I give you my word that I am as real as you are. You asked my name.” His voice gets deeper, majestic. “I am Balder, son of Odin, brother of Hödr, friend to all.”

“Balder, wasn’t he a Norse god?” I say, remembering all my mother’s bedtime stories.

“Indeed.” He sounds pleased. “I am. Or I was. Once, in another time, another world. But Loki, the trickster, cursed me,” he growls. “And I found myself in this false form, forced to travel endlessly the nine worlds of Yggdrasil in the possession of others until I could find one who could understand, who had the sight to see through to my true nature. You are that soul, and now you will guide me to Ringhorn.” (2009, p. 254, emphasis present in text)

Balder restricts his Norse god status as existing once “in another time, another world,” (p. 254). This is the realm traditionally ascribed to myth. So what happens to Balder when he is presented as existing in modern society? He is viewed as a lawn ornament, a traveling gnome to be stolen by teenagers who take his photo, an object waiting for
someone to see beyond his appearance.

The realism of Balder’s inclusion may be called into question since Cameron is arguably having hallucinations due to Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, or mad cow. His entire journey may be questioned as to whether it happened or whether he dreamed it as he remains in his hospital bed. The inclusion of the mythic figure again operates from the safe realm of the potentially unreal despite both Cameron and Balder’s assertion that their encounters are real, since Cameron’s diagnosis calls into question his ability to perceive the world.

Cameron’s imagining his adventure may also be seen as a coping mechanism for dealing with his disease, his feeling that he has not fully lived life yet and his eventual death. After he is initially diagnosed, Cameron describes his denial of his terminal illness:

You know what works? Denial. As a coping tool, denial is severely underrated. Hey, maybe it’s a mistake and I’ve just gotten a wicked bad flu. Doctors make mistakes all the time. Psych—just kidding!

For a long time, I thought it would be cool to die young. Honestly, things weren’t going so well in the life department. Death seemed infinitely more glamorous and, you know, kind of hard to fuck up. I confess that most of the dying fantasy involved watching every girl who’d ever dissed me throwing herself on my coffin, sobbing over my early demise and confessing that she’d always wanted me and wished she’d had the chance to claim my virginity while I was alive.

Problem is, I won’t be around to sample the goods. I’ll be turning into a sponge head. This is the sort of stuff I think about with the few brain cells I’ve got left.
Of course, Mom and dad are convinced the diagnosis is wrong. And I want to believe them. Just like I want to believe that Staci Johnson [a popular girl who attends my high school] secretly wants me and uses constant hostility to mask her lustful impulses. (p. 86)

Throughout Cameron’s road trip with a boy from his high school named Gonzo and with Balder, he achieves several of the seemingly unreachable goals he had before his diagnosis: He makes friends, bonds with his sister (p. 396-398) and has sex with Staci Johnson (p. 407-408). There are also intermixed scenes, perhaps dreams, in which Cameron still seems to be in his hospital bed with his health deteriorating (pp. 180-181, pp. 351-352, pp. 408-411). The fact that Cameron lives out his fantasies encourages the reader to question what is real, what is Cameron’s emotional truth and what is the reality in the story, leaving the reader to decide whether to believe Cameron ever left his hospital bed at all. Michaela Baltasar (2004) notes, “fantasy done well, however, can also cause a reversal of what is perceived as reality” (2004, p. 34). In the case of Going Bovine (Bray, 2009), perhaps the reversal is true and the reality becomes the fantastic. Most of the novels in my sample draw the reader’s attention to myth, the way reality is constructed for the characters and to popular ways of perceiving the world.

Many Ways to Understand the World

How do people explain the ways the world works? How was the world created? With a Big Bang? In seven days? Did a bird birth it from an egg? Science, religion and myth are all ways to understand or perceive the physical and social worlds. They are
paradigms or worldviews to explain the way the world works and people’s place in that world. Mary E. Williams notes, “all around us, significances, meanings, discoveries beckon. To notice them, we must be open, alert, and hospitable. Invariably, meaning resides within the perceiver as well as in what is perceived” (2005, p. 12). When open to such ways of making meaning, there are still many stories, paradigms or worldviews that the perceiver may lend her belief to. Within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, the characters play with positions that incorporate beliefs in aliens, truth, Christianity as well as myth.

**Aliens and myth.**

Although myth is the paradigm the protagonists ascribe to and understand to be reality in my sample of children’s novels, other systems of belief, other ways of making meaning of what a character perceives, are often incorporated. For example in *Iris, Messenger* (Deming, 2007), after meeting several of the Greek gods, Iris has trouble believing her biology teacher, Mrs. Webb’s perspective. The teacher is described as being unusual:

Mrs. Webb was a strange choice for a biology teacher, because she believed the planet Earth was a science project created by aliens, like a large Ant Farm. She wore the same sweat suit to school every day. It was black velour, emblazoned with airbrushed alien heads and Egyptian pyramids. Mrs. Webb always managed to work aliens into any project they did. Iris was getting an awful grade in the class, because she couldn’t see alien heads in fossils or hear alien voices over the
ham radio. None of the other students could, either, of course, but they went along with the program. (pp. 133-134)

Mrs. Webb chooses to believe that aliens created the universe and she uses her position of authority as a teacher to advocate her stance among her students. Iris is the lone student who resists her teacher’s bias; fueled by the fact that her mother is a scientist and by the fact that she has encountered the gods of Greek myth, another paradigm. Mrs. Webb begins to describe red blood cells to her students as a part of a class experiment:

Mrs. Webb drew a picture of a flying saucer on the board. “The average human red blood cell is shaped like this. Coincidence? It’s up to you to find out.” Iris rolled her eyes. Her adventures with the gods had given her less patience for the kind of nonsense that went on in her classes. Also, she was sleep-deprived, which made her irritable. She raised her hand. Mrs. Webb frowned.

“Yes, Iris?”

“My mother said red blood cells are shaped that way to give them more surface area for gasses to be passed back and forth, because that’s the main thing red blood cells do is transport—”

Mrs. Webb interrupted her. “Yes, well, I know your mother has some strange beliefs. We had an amusing talk on Career Day. She actually thinks humans are descended from monkeys!” The class laughed dutifully. (p. 134)

Here tensions among the ways different paradigms may be used to explain facets of the world emerge. Mrs. Webb believes red blood cells reflect aliens’ influence upon the world. Iris has been taught a scientific explanation by her mother. Plus, since Iris knows that the Greek gods exist, she dismisses her teacher’s beliefs. Various paradigms may be
in conflict as they present explanations or guide perceptions of the world and experience.

To view this alien paradigm from another perspective, *I Am Number Four* (Lore, 2010) assumes the existence of aliens and shares one’s perspective as he grows up in hiding on Earth. Although not part of my sample, I share this novel as an example to provide an alternate perspective on the way the relationship between myth and aliens is presented. In the first novel in the science-fiction Lorien Legacies series, the protagonist, John Smith, is a Loric alien hiding from another species of alien who destroyed his planet and now seeks him and the other Loric survivors on Earth. The novel mentions many of the Greek gods were actually the half-human descendants from the Lorien race who were helping to “develop civilizations” on Earth (p. 275). John asks his protector, Henri, what would happen if he had children with a human on Earth:

“What happens if we try to have children with humans?”

“It’s happened many times before. Usually it results in an exceptional and gifted human. Some of the greatest figures in Earth’s history were actually the product of humans and the Loric, including Buddha, Aristotle, Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein. Many of the ancient Greek Gods, who most people believe were mythological, were actually the children of the humans and Loric, mainly because it was much more common then for us to be on this planet and we were helping them develop civilizations. Aphrodite, Apollo, Hermes, and Zeus were all real, and had one Loric parent.”

“So it is possible.”

“It was possible. In our current situation it’s reckless and impractical. (p. 275)
This provides an explanation for traditional mythic figures and a way for structuring status and power among characters within the reality of the story: The Lorien aliens, their children and then humans.

In contrast to Deming’s *Iris, Messenger* (2007), *I Am Number Four* (2010) normalizes the paradigm that aliens live on Earth and establishes ancient human beliefs as having an alien origin, challenging more commonly accepted paradigms. These differing stances position the reader in different ways and allow her to consider the paradigm of aliens helping to develop humanity on Earth in various ways and from various perspectives.

**Straddling truth and reality.**

Thirteen-year-old Charlotte Mielswetzski in Anne Ursu’s *Cronus Chronicles* trilogy (2006, 2007, 2009) has a way with words. She seems to know just the right thing to say. To her, “truth was a flexible instrument, one that could readily be shaped to fit her needs” (2006, p. 24). This is one of her strengths or tools she uses throughout the series as she slowly comes to terms with her need to become a hero and protect humans—alive and dead—from indifferent gods and a power hungry demon named Philonecron. The narrator of the series notes Charlotte’s tendency to stretch the truth since “usually a good story was so much more interesting than the truth” (p. 25). This emphasis on story, on myths, is also taken up in Scott Mebus’s *Gods of Manhattan* trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010). The protagonist, Rory, has the power to see the truth at all times, to see through tricks and beyond false explanations. He has trouble accepting the
perspective of Washington Irving, the God of Tall Tales, that a bit of truth in a story can be as true as “the plain old truth.” In the second novel of the series, *Spirits in the Park* (2009), when Irving informs Rory that he has voyaged into the mists and found a plant that allowed him to speak any language he wished, Rory says “I don’t believe you,” (p. 116) and Irving informs Rory:

“Certainly you could tell the story of my recent travels another way. You could say I went to the market and bought some string beans from an Italian gentleman who taught me how to say thank you by saying ‘grazie!’ But I’ve already put you to sleep with that version.”

“So you don’t tell the truth?” Rory asked, not looking happy about that at all.

“Of course I do,” Irving replied blithely, unfazed by Rory’s rudeness. “I just dress it up a bit. Make it more interesting. The plain old truth is so dull, isn’t it? And rarely as ‘true’ as most people insist.” (p. 116)

This hints at the idea that truth may be relative to many people, hints at various ways one experience may be interpreted, and hints at the potential power of story and belief in story. Irving goes on to describe how because two women previously spread a story he lived in a certain house, using language to socially construct a new reality or truth, and because many people believed that story, after his death, Irving became the God of Tall Tales and that house, which he had never lived in, became his home:

“They [the two women] began to tell people that I had lived in their home, to generate publicity for themselves. It didn’t matter that my nieces and nephews all wrote in to angrily denounce the tale. They knew I had never set foot in this place. But in the end, the story won.
“Eventually someone stuck that plaque out front [saying, “This house was once the home of Washington Irving” (p. 115)], and now everyone thinks I lived here. And what’s worse, because they all believe it, now I have to live here. Ironic, no? That the great storyteller is trapped by a story.”  (p. 117)

This portion of *Spirits in the Park* demonstrates the power of story. It shows the power of human belief; that within the world of the story, people believed two publicity-minded women, a sign on the side of a house, despite arguments to the contrary from Irving’s relatives. The story became true within the mythic realm of Mannahatta where Irving resides as a god.

When someone is uncertain about what to believe, which story to hold as truth—whether the potential explanation is a recent study exploring reader engagement with literature and its influence upon student writing within the classroom, the idea that Greek muses spark ideas in a writer’s mind or that the Judeo-Christian God inspires ideas—it is hard to declare any one answer as truth. Even more difficult than when characters have to choose what to believe, is the experience of when characters who believe different paradigms meet. Such potential conflicts may be on a personal level or among cultures.

In *The Sorcerer’s Secret* (Mebus, 2010), the third novel of the Gods of Manhattan trilogy, Rory worries about his ability to see both the mythic realm of Mannahatta and the real world of Manhattan:

Rory felt suddenly alone. Looking around at all the gods and Indians, spirits and creatures, he realized that he couldn’t stay in this place. He was still a mortal. He had a life waiting for him in the real Manhattan, and there was no place for battle roaches and albino alligators there. He had to go to school, and do homework and
one day get a job and live a normal life. He couldn’t be the crazy guy going on about talking statues and invisible ships. He had to go and be normal. (p. 369)

While Rory seems prepared to choose the realistic world, his friend and love-interest, a Munsee Indian spirit named Soka, approaches and the two discuss how Rory feels alone, straddling two worlds:

“I’m just taking it all in before I have to go back,” he said sadly.

“Back where?” Soka asked, furrowing her brow. “You live up the street.”

“Back to normal life. I can’t live like this forever. Straddling two worlds, one of which no one else can see.”

“They can if you show them,” Soka reminded him.

“But I can’t do that,” he replied. “It’s too dangerous. I’ve got to stay the only one who—”

“Oh, just stop it!” Soka said, shaking her head. “You are not alone, Rory Hennessy! You have a sister who loves you, a mother who would do anything for you, and a father who’s returned from the dead! You have friends who care about you, even if you can’t take them outside the city limits. You belong in Mannahatta, and you belong in Manhattan. People straddle two world all the time. Look at me. I’m a Munsee girl in love with a pale-faced Irish boy. People think I’m crazy! But I know it’s definitely worth it.” With that, she leaned over and kissed him, and as he folded her into his arms, Rory knew that he’d never be alone again. (pp. 369-370, emphasis present in text)

Like some readers who have experienced two cultures, have grown up in a mixed-race family or know the experience of feeling like they do not fit within a group, Rory worries
about his sense of belonging. He is a child of two words, the mythic realm, Mannahatta, and the realistic Manhattan and he fears being able to reconcile the differences in his relationships with others as he grows older. It would seem, with Soka’s urging, he hopes to accommodate both of his worlds.

**Christianity and myth.**

Although not an official part of my study due to the fact that no gods or goddesses are actually presented as characters, the fantasy series about unicorn slayers by Diana Peterfreund also demonstrates this tension of two paradigms in conflict. I draw upon Peterfreund’s unicorn hunter series because of how well it articulates this tension between worldviews and because it is a strong example of how early twenty-first century young adult fantasy literature may ground itself in folklore to lend authority to the narrative and to build the world and reality within the story. The books, *Rampant* (2009) and *Ascendant* (2010) share the story of sixteen-year-old Astrid, who is considering losing her virginity to her boyfriend Brandt when they are attacked in the woods by a unicorn. Astrid learns that unicorns do exist and she is the descendant of a warrior-nun, who along with other nuns of the Order of the Lioness, lived in an Italian cloister and killed violent unicorns that threatened humanity. Astrid soon travels to Italy where she trains with other teenage girls to fight the rising number of violent unicorns. Astrid learns that the order was originally formed under the patronage of the Roman goddess Diana (also known as the goddess Artemis).

When the Catholic church offers to help fund the resurrection of the Order of the
Lioness in the second novel, *Ascendant* (2010), the issue of the girls’ source of inhuman strength, fast healing and super-speed, are debated with Father Guillermo, the Church’s representative. He informs the assembled girls:

“I will be the liaison between your group and the Church, and I look forward to assisting you and seeing you work these miracles firsthand.”

…“Besides,” said Melissende, “we aren’t miracle workers.”

“Nonsense,” said Father Guillermo. “Your skills in battle, your gift of healing—what are they but miracles from God?

“Sorcery?” Melissende suggested with a shrug. Rosamund scowled at her.

“What is your word for pagan magic?”

…“Our hunter gifts were bestowed on the line of Alexander the Great by the ancient goddess Diana,” [Melissende] said. “Certainly you know that.”

Father Guillermo didn’t miss a beat. “Certainly I know what the old pagan myths say. They are very pretty stories to be sure, and they were all the ancients had, since Christ had not yet been born. No, my dear, trust me: your gifts are miracles of God. The powers you wield, the Order of the Lioness, are like the Pantheon—an ancient pagan artifact that has long since been refocused to give glory to the one true God. I will pray that you glorify Him and that He keeps you safe on your next mission.” (pp. 43-44).

Two understandings of the world—the myth-based belief in Diana and the religious belief in the Christian God—have come into conflict. By extension the two believers in these different paradigms also feel in conflict. Yet either story—Diana bestowing the girls’ powers or of God granting a miracle—could explain the characters’ experiences.
Furthermore, in the peritext of the first novel *Rampant*, the author Peterfreund includes the note: “The unicorns in this book are real; they populate the legends, histories, and religious texts of Europe and Asia” (2009, no pagination). This too could either challenge a reader’s belief system about what is real in her understanding of the way the world is structured or position her to understand her reality in a new way: *If a creature is incorporated into many legends, histories and religious texts do you think of it as real, as something to believe in?*

It is rare that a novel from my sample allows alternate ways of understanding the world to truly intermingle, whether in conflict or to portray acceptance of others’ beliefs. Rather, protagonists question reality and their ability to perceive it properly. Myth and religion are somehow assumed to be different, perhaps one is “metaphysical” (Riordan, 2005, p. 67), allegorical or false and the other is positioned as truth someone perceives as experience. An implication of my research is that it is important to reflect upon what individual readers assume to be truth, reality, fantasy or falsehood as they read and engage with the world created within the story. How a person regards different worldviews and perceptions of the world may influence how she positions the people in her own social circles. The potential privilegings, positionings and conflicts among different mingling mythic systems is the subject of Chapter Six.

Within this chapter I have explored how, when classified within the genre of fantasy, these young adult and middle grade novels within my sample may avoid seeming controversial or avoid challenging other paradigms, but still explore dimensions of faith and perceiving reality. I have discussed the worldviews explored within my sample, including those of traditional myth, Christian faith and alien intervention upon humanity.
I have also discussed the experience of when a paradigm fails to explain what a character is perceiving as well as the experience of hesitation or uncertainty when she encounters fantasy. These tensions over truth, fantasy, perception, interpretation, etc. represent present-day and eternal concerns of humanity.

Critic Northrop Frye writes that, "Poets are the children of concern: they normally reflect the ideologies of their own times, and certainly they are conditioned by their historical and cultural surroundings" (Frye, 1990, p. 21). So, myth and story reveal aspects of the author, speaker, teacher or storyteller and her understanding of culture and her perception of reality and the structure of the world. The reader may then choose to reject, accept or change these ideologies or constructions of reality. She can use the close correspondence between fiction and reality to help form her understandings of the world. She may use literature or one of the novels within this sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels as a guide to position herself within a society and to think about the concerns and ideologies the novels present. The ideological implications of the novels in my sample are the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Five: The ideological weight of myth

American Born Chinese

Medusa Jones

Dusssie

Need series

Gods of Manhattan trilogy

The Night Tourist duology

Halo series

Percy Jackson series

Kane Chronicles

“Did the West die? The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while. Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there.”

~Chiron to Percy

Rick Riordan, The Lightning Thief, 2005, p. 72

Researching and re-presenting mythic figures positions the researchers, the authors, the cultures, the readers, the topics and the characters explored in the narratives within larger conversations of power and ideology. Whether intentionally included or a part of the author and reader’s own unspoken assumptions about the world, when stories incorporate assumptions and beliefs about the world, society, relationships, etc. this can be interpreted as the transmission of information and power relationships among the subjects, authors and readers. Charles Sarland (1996) writes:

Ideology will be taken to refer to all espousal, assumption, consideration, and discussion of social and cultural values, whether overt or covert. In that sense it
will include common sense itself, for common sense is always concerned with the values and underlying assumptions of our everyday lives. (pp. 42-43)

This definition of ideology focuses on the subtle ideological messages and socializing nature of literature. Sarland elaborates on the use of ideology in writing:

…all writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is itself inevitably suffused with values, that is to say, suffused with ideology. (1996, p. 43)

Ideology is regularly a part of all communication to help socialize people and influence the ways they perceive the world. These overt and covert messages can shift as the culture that shares the narrative and its values change, revealing characteristics about that culture and the concerns of its people.

John Stephens, a scholar who focuses his studies on children’s literature, has closely examined the way ideology and discourse are present in children’s fiction. He mentions that ideology can be in both a story and its significance:

On the one hand, the significance deduced from a text—its theme, moral, insight into behaviour, and so on—is never without an ideological dimension or connotation. On the other hand, and less overtly, ideology is implicit in the way the story an audience derives from a text exists as an isomorph of events in the actual world: even if the story’s events are wholly or partly impossible in actuality, narrative sequences and character interrelationships will be shaped according to recognizable forms, and that shaping can in itself express ideology in so far as it implies assumptions about the forms of human existence. (1992, p. 2)
In other words, readers may make meaning and learn about social behaviors and worldviews through the themes, morals and relationships shared by and within a text.

Stephens goes on to note:

Children’s fiction belongs firmly within the domain of cultural practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience. Childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what and how to think—in general, the intention is to render the world intelligible. (1992, p. 8)

Within the cultures that both Stephens and I are writing, young adult and children’s literature is perceived to help young readers make meaning about the world, their culture and their position within these structures. This is one of the same purposes ascribed to the realm of myth, meaning they do similar socializing work.

Traditional myth and folklore, as narratives, have existed and evolved over time. The ideology attached to these narratives has often been infused with many ideological implications, some of which also shift over time. Fairy tale scholar, Jack Zipes writes that this is historically true for folklore, and particularly fairy tales; when used with children:

Certainly one can speak about the single literary fairy tale for children as a symbolic act infused by the ideological viewpoint of the individual author.

Almost all critics who have studied the emergence of the literary fairy tale in Europe agree that educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so
that children would become civilized according to the social code of that time. The writers of fairy tales for children acted ideologically by presenting their notions regarding social conditions and conflicts, and they interacted with each other and with past writers and storytellers of folklore in a public sphere. The interaction led to an institutionalized symbolic discourse on the civilizing process which served as the basis for the fairy-tale genre. (1991, p. 3, emphasis present in text)

These ideological implications are also noticeably present in modern re-presentations of myth. The novels within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels incorporate overt and covert ideological implications about the choices scholars and writers make when examining or including mythic figures to draw attention to cultures and causes or to re-present nations in certain ways. These ideological implications are the subject of this chapter, and the following three (Table 12).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Description of Idea</th>
<th>Example Novels from Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Mythic figures are re-presented to include a feminist stance within their characterizations.</td>
<td><em>Thief Eyes</em> (Simner, 2010), <em>Dusssie</em> (Springer, 2007), etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Causes</td>
<td>This may include ideas such as participating in community service programs, but the most common cause the sampled children’s novels included was environmental conservation.</td>
<td><em>Halo</em> series, (Adornetto, 2010), The Devil’s Kiss series (Chadda, 2009, 2010), The Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), The New Policeman trilogy (Thompson, 2007, 2008, 2010), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>This idea usually explores the experience of heterosexual romantic love; although a few protagonists did contemplate desires for familial love. (This is discussed in Chapter One.)</td>
<td><em>Halo</em> series, (Adornetto, 2010), <em>Iris, Messenger</em> (Deming, 2007), <em>Hush, hush</em> series (Fitzpatrick, 2009, 2010), <em>Fallen</em> series (Kate, 2009, 2010), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationships</td>
<td>Ideas are presented that privilege certain belief systems or position them as addressing different concerns of life. (This is explored in Chapter Six.)</td>
<td><em>Guardian of the Dead</em> (Healey, 2010), Need series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), Riordan’s three series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among Different Systems of Belief</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Relationships</td>
<td>These ideas explore the familial, supportive or adversarial power relationships between the protagonists, humanity and the mythic figures. (This is examined in Chapter Seven.)</td>
<td><em>Iris, Messenger</em> (Deming, 2007), The Percy Jackson series (Riordan, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), The Cronus Chronicles trilogy (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009), etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between humanity and the Gods</td>
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I will also define and explore the concept of *new myth*; in which, instead of re-presenting traditional figures and giving them modern ideological positions, young adult and children’s novels within my sample position new or younger figures, such as famous people from American history, as gods. First, I would like to consider the way folklore researchers and scholars have historically positioned themselves and their subjects when studying traditional myth.

**The Ideologically-Driven Researcher**

While researching cultures in which traditional myth is still “alive,” French historian Mircea Eliade describes the people within those cultures as “natives,” positioning them in a certain way, separating them from himself and making a subtle assertion about what type of people and cultures have myths (1976, p. 4; Cave, 1993). Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the founders of modern anthropology, and like-minded researchers and others referred to those who believed in myths as “primitives,” making an assertion about who can tell and believe in traditional myth, and positioning them as having lower status to the researchers who documented the beliefs (1984, p. 195).

In the young adult novel *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010), this history of European researchers infusing records of other cultures’ myths with their own ideological stances is alluded to. The novel’s protagonist Ellie Spencer learns that she must protect her best friend Kevin from a Māori fairy, or a patupaiarehe. She not only listens to the first hand accounts of Mark, a chimera—which here refers to the fact that he disguises his
true appearance with an illusion and not to the Chimera figure in Ancient Greek
mythology: A beast with the body of “a lion in front, a serpent behind, a goat in
between” (Hamilton, 1969, p. 189)—who is a quarter patupaiarehe and the son of the
fairy that threatens Kevin, but she also examines folklore texts at the local University
library, noting: “I flipped through the titles. And how come so many Māori stories were
written down by people with Pākehā names? How much of this was worth believing?”
(Healey, 2010, pp. 149-150). Pākehā is the Māori term that “refers to New Zealanders of
predominantly white European ancestry. [It is] Also sometimes used to refer to [a] non-
Māori of any ethnicity” (p. 341, glossary). While doing her research, Ellie draws
attention to the fact that the accounts of traditional Māori myth are not recorded by Māori
people themselves, but rather by people of European descent or by ethnic outsiders. Ellie
is critical of this fact and questions whether she can trust the accounts.

I do not wish to vilify past folklore researchers. They were part of a much larger
paradigm of how the world, power and the positions of people from different
backgrounds have been understood. In the preface to one of the collections of his work,
Eliade notes:

For, at a certain level, the study of the History of Religions is a continuous
encounter with things that are “Wholly other” to us as modern Westerners: other
cultures, other times, other systems of speculation and reflection. Such an
encounter with the foreign or bewildering has great potential for catalyzing
creative experiences of all types…But the delimitation of this experience within a
limited preserve that is open only to scholars is no less stultifying than the
dismissal of all that is foreign as “primitive” or “nonsense.” It is my fondest hope
that the encounter with archaic, Oriental, and exotic cultures can serve to provoke thought and understanding, deepening our appreciation of man and his imagination—religious and otherwise—while provoking our own. (1976, pp. xvii-xviii)

Eliade is calling for those among different cultures to understand one another, to be inspired by what others have done in the ancient past or what others are doing now. It is not the sentiment or motive of past researchers like Eliade that is problematic but most often the language and its modern connotations are at fault as well as the fact that the researchers themselves do not acknowledge that they too have myth.

These researchers are a part of a larger systemic paradigm of assumptions and of a dialogue of superiority and inferiority. In fact, as one of the first anthropologists to be honored for his research, Malinowski, who was Polish, joked that he could join with the people he studied easily “perhaps [because] the Slavonic nature is more plastic and more naturally savage than that of Western Europeans” (Moore, 1997, p. 131). Imagine a scale with “savage” at one end and “Western Europeans” on the other, Malinowski positioned himself as being closer to the “savage” experience than that of his fellow ethnographers from other parts of Europe. In his work to understand the culture and functional roles of the traditional myths of others, he imagined himself as being in some ways similar to those he studied, showing how systemic the language and assumptions of positioning and status have been within the history of folklore research.

Of course, present-day researchers are also weighed down by their own ideological assumptions. Probably only time and distance will reveal the full extent of our own mess. For the time being, a more recent trend among researchers and scholars is
to accept that *all* cultures have myth. Eric Csapo recorded an expanded definition of myth, which accommodates this shift in ideological understanding:

“Myth” is not necessarily a traditional tale, nor the product of a primitive mentality, nor the expression of a contrasting culture: no longer conceived as an attribute of the Other, myth by this new definition is very much the stuff of our own modern Western/global society. (2005, p. 277)

Not only are researchers influenced by their own culture’s stories and ideologies, but those underlying ideologies influence the way myth is defined and the realms it is thought to encompass. This shift in definition encourages scholars to look inward to their own culture and themselves just as much as they look outward to examine the beliefs of others.

By this present-day thought, all cultures, communities, families and individuals have myths. It may be easier to accept this assumption when considering the definition of myth scribed by Bruce Lincoln, a history of religions scholar. Lincoln characterized myth as “ideology in narrative form” (1999, p. 207). Similarly, Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary critic and scholar who wrote through the mid to late-twentieth century, notes, “Like most mythologies of concern, its [for this example, the Bible’s] primary function to illuminate and rationalize the structure of authority, both spiritual and temporal, within its society” (Frye, 1990, p. 44). Following these expanded definitions, myth is not just a sacred belief held by someone in a far off culture long ago. Myth consists of the stories people tell themselves in the past, the present and in the future to give meaning to their experiences and to their understanding of their reality and world that they use to position themselves within a society. Although all myths may be seen as
privileged, given their historical status as sacred, Gregory Nagy, who writes about the influence of scholar and fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien, expands on this idea:

Myth is a culturally privileged story, and you have to have a culture for that culture to privilege anything; but once the context has been created, stories in the text that created it can be reinterpreted and can function in a privileged way. (2004, p. 90)

This leads to the re-presentations of traditional myth and to shifting ideologies that emerge as these once sacred narratives and figures are recontextualized to function in ways that are still privileged. Although scholars have become more aware and contemplative about the way ideology and power influence how myth is perceived, it is still impossible to prevent ideologies from influencing the way myth is interpreted and re-presented. The work of reflection and analysis must continue. So now I turn to some of the ideologies incorporated into the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, including the tendencies to privilege certain cultures, nations and stances towards gender and environmental causes.

Privileged Ideology

Myths and mythic figures from certain cultures tend to be included and re-presented in young adult and middle grade children’s novels from my sample more often than others. C.W. Sullivan, who studies Celtic influences on children’s literature, addresses this issue of how the myths of certain cultures—mainly Greek and Roman—are privileged. He writes about several factors that influence the historical lack of Celtic
representation in children’s literature:

The first factor was, of course, the Western European cultural preference for the Mediterranean myths and legends of Greece and Rome, myths and legends that had been a part of the British and continental educational systems since the Renaissance. The educated populace knew the Greek and Roman myths and legends, and the Greek and Roman characters were the ones who appeared in the literature of the time and who filtered down to the rest of the population. As a result, English and American scholars since have paid little attention to Celtic materials which they considered, to say the least, rustic. (1989, p. 2)

It would be very easy to argue that the same is still true to a degree and that many other cultures’ myths are being ignored, not just Celtic traditional myths. For example, Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009) and the Heroes of Olympus series (2010b) only include figures from Greek and Roman myths. The same is true for Tera Lynn Childs’s young adult novel duology, *Oh.My.Gods* (2008) and *Goddess Boot Camp* (2009), Sarah Deming’s middle grade novel *Iris, Messenger* (2007), Katherine Marsh’s young adult duology, *The Night Tourist* (2007) and *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009), and Nancy Springer’s middle grade novel *Dusssie* (2007). In the case of Riordan, he does not specifically speak to the privileging of Greek and Roman myths, but has cited that the hero’s quest and allusions to the Olympians as commonplace in literature (2008b):

> Once you know mythology, you see it everywhere—from the names of our days of the week to our art and architecture. You would be hard-pressed to find any work of English literature that does not draw to some extent on classical
mythology, whether it’s the hero’s quest or allusions to the Olympians. (p. viii)

Although it is Norse mythology that has contributed to the English names of the days of the week, Riordan only incorporates Greek figures into his Percy Jackson series and does not directly explain this choice. It seems that for many authors choosing to focus on Greek and Roman mythology is the “natural” choice or the familiar option. This assumption and tendency needs to be problematized; since Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, Japanese, Māori, Mayan, Native American, Norse cultures and on and on have also influenced what it is to live in this complex global modern world. Riordan at least has also begun to look at traditional Egyptian myth’s influence upon modern culture. (This is explored in depth in Chapter Six.)

Other voices, however, that include and re-present cultures’ traditional myths seem to be growing louder. These young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample incorporate more cultures and their myths’ into American society. As also discussed in Chapter Three, Gene Luen Yang’s young adult graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (2006), appears to tell three different, loosely connected stories:

1. As a young boy, Jin Wang has trouble adjusting to being one of the only Chinese-American students at his school. In fifth grade, a Taiwanese boy named Wei-Chen Sun enrolls and they become best friends as Jin helps Wei-Chen navigate his new country.

2. In other chapters of the novel, the Chinese Monkey King feels excluded by the other gods and works to prove his place as their equal.

3. Seemingly white middle class young adult, Danny, must deal with a visit from his cousin, Chin-Kee who embodies many negative stereotypes of Chinese
people.

It is only in the concluding section of the graphic novel that the images and text reveal that Danny is actually the Americanized teenage version of Jin Wang from the first storyline and his stereotypically Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, is actually the Monkey King in disguise.

After learning about humility and being true to his identity in the mythic realm of the second storyline, the Monkey King fears that one of his sons will forget who he is and why he lives among humanity. The son is Wei-Chen, Jin’s “fresh off the boat” (p. 89) friend, who is actually a monkey who traveled to America disguised as a human to complete a test of virtue to remain “free of human vice” for 40 years (p. 217). Since befriending Jin, Wei-Chin has lost sight of his motive for living among the humans. Together, Wei-Chen and Jin/Danny learn the same lesson the monkey King experienced in the re-presented traditional myth.

Published the same year as *American Born Chinese*, Celestine Woo (2006) completed a study of Lawrence Yep’s fantasy novels, examining the potential ways the inclusion of Asian folklore and traditional myth in children’s fantasy literature could better allow Asian-American readers to identify with the text. She writes:

Chinese Americans can look to the vast cultural heritage of China, but this mythology is that of their ancestors, who dwelt in a different land. A people displaced from its homeland necessarily establishes a different relationship with its mythology, and the mythology must change to accommodate and incorporate the displacement. (p. 261)

Woo is commenting that the stories of the past that describe a group of people—in this
case the Chinese—must be reinterpreted or re-presented to accommodate the current experiences and changes the group may be undergoing; especially in such a situation as emigrating from the land of origin. In the case of *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006), the experience of becoming Chinese-American is re-presented. The graphic novel plays with traditional myth, re-presenting it in the form of a graphic novel and pairing it with modern situations that give the traditional myth a new significance within the experience of being a child of immigrants struggling to understand his identity as both Chinese and American.

In the first chapter of *American Born Chinese*, the Monkey King is excluded from a party where all the other gods, goddesses, demons and spirits are in attendance. A guard informs him, “Look. You may be a king—you may even be a deity—but you are still a monkey” and encourages the Monkey King to leave the party (p. 15). This exclusion and its positional implication that he is “less than” the other partygoers embarrasses the Monkey King and he begins to devise ways to free himself from the scent of his “monkey fur” (p. 20).

This parallels Jin/Danny’s experience with his friend Wei-Chen. As the two deal with living in present-day America, Jin is warned by the wife of an herbalist that, “It’s easy to become anything you wish...so long as you’re willing to forfeit your soul” (p. 29). Several years later, after Jin has worked to adopt the appearance and culture of his white classmates and transitions into Danny, Chin-Kee reveals his “true form” as the Monkey King (p. 213) and then informs Danny that he too must show his true form and visually Danny’s appearance as a light-haired, white boy reverts to the appearance of a slightly older Jin (Figure 8):
In their conversation, the Monkey King shares his motives in approaching Jin, saying, “I came to serve as your conscience—as a signpost to your soul” (p. 221). This re-presented and expanded myth may serve the same purpose for readers struggling with their own identity in a global community, in one where a different culture is privileged or in a situation in which a reader feels like an outsider.

Here the Chinese traditional myth of the Monkey King gains new meaning through its juxtaposition with Jin’s experience. It gives insights to what it is to be Chinese, American and an American born Chinese, demonstrating the difficulty of maintaining a Chinese identity while living in the United States. According to Stephens,
narratives like this one, “contribute towards a positive self-concept for children from minority groups, and...contribute to the social and personal development of all children by effacing notions of racial, class or gender superiority” (1992, p. 51). By combining traditional myth with realistic experiences of inequality, stereotyping and the ways language is used to position a character, writers and readers may move toward a more global understanding of the world, cultures, myth, people and themselves.

**Shifting Gendered Ideology of Mythic Figures: Medusa and Medea**

Aside from referencing traditional myths, Yang and other authors from the sample who incorporate myths in present-day settings, share new meanings for the mythic figures they choose to play with and re-present. This illustrates Reader Response theorist Louise M. Rosenblatt’s note about literary authors:

> The writer often becomes the medium through which the future is forecast. Often especially sensitive to the new tendencies at work in the society about him, he disseminates images of new goals. These images may kindle in his readers emotional drives toward setting up new patterns of conduct and new social structure. (1995, p. 186)

Privileging the re-presentations of myths may be symbolic of shifting social structures within American culture. Similarly, when writing specifically about the intentions of some children’s authors, Stephens notes:

> Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed,
are shared by author and audience. These values include modern morality and ethics concerns, a sense of what is valuable in the culture’s past...and aspirations about the present and future. Since a culture’s future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children’s writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into ‘desirable’ forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose. (1992, p. 3)

Through books, children’s authors stand in a position to intentionally reaffirm the ideologies of his or her readers or to try to shift them. Re-presentations of myth and the inclusion of mythic figures are privileged stories and at different times, different myths or figures are privileged or positioned in different ways. This is often done by re-presenting myths previously ignored or interpreted in a different way. Lincoln writes:

> Among other possibilities, one might struggle to deprive an established myth of its authority; one might agitate for the elevation of a lesser narrative to the status of myth; or one might modify the details of an accepted myth's standard narration or advance new lines of interpretation for it. (1989, p. 27)

While I will show some historical examples of “lesser narratives” that are gaining the status of myth later in this chapter and in the Conclusion, my purposes in this section are to show examples of established mythic figures from traditional myth being included and re-presented with the potential for new interpretations in young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample. The inclusion of Medusa in Springer’s middle grade novel, *Dusssie* (2007), offers a sensitive interpretation of a gorgon. According to Appoldorus who created a “handbook” of Greek myth during the first two centuries AD
(Trzaskoma, Smith & Brunet, 2004, p. 17), “the gorgons had heads with serpents’ coils spiraling around them, large tusks like boars, bronze arms, and gold wings with which they could fly. They turned those who saw them into stone” (p. 32). While Medusa is the most famous Gorgon, Springer includes one of her sisters, Euryale, into her middle grade novel.

_Dusssie_ is narrated from the perspective of Dusie, the modern-day daughter of Euryale Gorgon. The thirteen-year-old girl wakes up in the morning after having her first menstrual period, to discover she has snakes protruding from her head instead of hair. Her mother has kept secret the fact that she is one of the gorgons from traditional Greek myth and her fear that Dusie may have to bear some of the consequences of the curse placed upon her and Medusa. After leaning of her mother’s past and the curse Dusie narrates:

Mom’s name hadn’t meant a thing to me. I mean, who knows what a gorgon is anymore?  
Mom hadn’t told me until today that under the turban her hair was vipers, under the polish her fingernails were bronze, under the caps her teeth were fangs. She hadn’t told me that she’d had wings surgically removed by a doctor who could be blackmailed to keep quiet. She _had_ told me, years ago, that she’d named me after her dead sister, but she hadn’t told me that Dusie was a nickname—short for Medusa. (pp. 7-8, emphasis present in text)

Dusie shares about how the realistic society created within the story is supposedly ignorant of traditional Greek myths that include Medusa and shares all of the effort her mother went through to blend into modern Western culture. Although not the focus of
the novel, the way Euryale changed as a mythic figure is essential for understanding a
changed interpretation of the gorgons. After Dusie manages to lift her curse, she wonders
why her mother was unable to do the same. The two discuss Euryale’s condition.

Euryale tells her daughter about the snakes protruding from her own head:

“I could never learn to love these vipers. They’re evil-tempered, venomous, hideous—”

But her snakes should match who she was. I burst out, “You’re not like that!”

“I was,” she said, matter-of-fact. “I was bitter, venomous, slug-ugly inside until your father loved me.

Oh.

“And then I had you.” Mom gave me the most amazing look: yearning, quizzical, tragic, quirky…“And you changed me even more.” (pp. 160-161)

While this re-presentation of Euryale is rooted in the traditional understanding of her and the other gorgons, this story allows for the character to have changed with time, to be influenced by the experiences of humanity, love and parenthood, to become a more positive representation of femininity, shifting the mythic figure’s significance.

_Dusssie_ concludes with a description of Euryale as Dusie hugs her: “She threw back her head, vipers coiling heavy in her turban, and laughed almost like a girl. And totally like a human being” (p. 166). Here the gorgon is not re-presented as a sympathetic figure from myth, but Euryale is humanized. Her snakes are an outward expression of who she was as a person when she was changed into a gorgon. In place of a presentation of a scorned lover or vengeful woman, the gorgon is re-presented as women capable of growth and of love. This is a significant shift in the ideology

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traditionally weighing upon the gorgons and upon Medusa, a shift to a lighter and more positive connotation.

The figure of Medusa is re-presented in the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan. In *The Lightning Thief* (2005), the first novel of the series, after Percy, along with his campmate Annabeth and a young satyr, named Grover, whose job is to protect Percy, are given a quest, they encounter Medusa before they can even leave the state of New York. The three young characters enter a store and restaurant called Aunty Em’s Garden Gnome Emporium. There, Percy, Annabeth and Grover encounter Medusa, who is disguised as an old Middle Eastern lady named Aunty Em who owns the shop. The characters do not immediately recognize Medusa due to her disguise and the narration does not reveal her identity as the mythic figure until the young characters realize it. While still disguised, Medusa recounts her traditional story of lost love to her guests in her own words after she has given them a meal:

> A bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a…a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me. They shared my bad fortune as long as they could, but eventually they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at a price. Such a price. (p. 176)

After she shares the myth of her origin in vague and modern terms like “boyfriend,” Percy expresses sympathy, narrating, “I felt bad for her. My eyelids kept getting heavier, my full stomach making me sleepy. Poor old lady. Who would want to hurt somebody so nice?” (p. 176). Instead of labeling Medusa a monster, Percy, and in turn the reader, may perceive her as pitiable or relatable. Modern readers are given the opportunity to

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understand the mythic figure from a new perspective with present-day terms.

In this case, the re-presentation is not a complete shift to a new positive significance, since Medusa still proves to be a threat to Percy and his friends and has only been luring them into a false sense of security with her story. A reader who may have suspected the old woman was Medusa may be aware of this developing threat to Percy and his friends in the novel and therefore may not sympathize with Medusa’s story at all. But this in turn lends power to a reader who is “in the know” about Medusa’s true nature as a serpent-haired gorgon with the stoney-gaze. That reader has inside information, a hint at what will happen next. Nonetheless, by including Medusa’s narrative in her own words, the reader is given access to the figure for interpretation. The reader may embrace the traditional ideological positions of the Medusa as a monster or see her from another standpoint, as a humanized and scorned woman.

Riordan uses a similar technique in The Lost Hero (2010b), the first novel in the Heroes of Olympus series, the sequel series to Percy Jackson. This time however, it is Medea, arguably “one of the most evil villains in Greek mythology” (Riordan, 2010b, p. 309), who tries to explain herself and the way she has been perceived historically while engaged in a battle of wills with Piper McLean, a daughter of Aphrodite, who is one of the three protagonists in the novel. Piper is familiar with the Medea’s position in traditional Greek mythology. Medea argues for her perspective:

“It’s true, I’m Medea. But I’m so misunderstood. Oh, Piper, my dear, you don’t know what it was like for women in the old days. We had no power, no leverage. Often we couldn’t even choose our own husbands. But I was different. I chose my own destiny by becoming a sorceress. Is that so wrong? I made a pact with
Jason: my help to win the [golden] fleece, in exchange for his love. A fair deal.

He became a famous hero! Without me, he would’ve died unknown on the shores of Colchis.” (p. 310, emphasis present in text)

Medea challenges the “traditional roles assigned to women” (Agha-Jaffar, 2005, p. 107). She argues that because women were denied autonomy in Ancient Greece, she took power and agency the only way she could, through magic. This implies that a woman who gains such agency and defies her society’s expectations is judged harshly.

Domnica Radulescu completed a study of the character of Medea and compared her to other female characters (2002). When she first discussed her motivation for her study she describes how she viewed Medea:

I see Medea as, so to speak, the basic tragic heroine who incorporates some of her most important aspects as she has developed over the centuries: frustrated erotic love, jealousy, maternity and bereaved maternity, rage and crime, creativity and destructiveness, defiance of male values, victimization and resistance or rebellion against male values and structures. (p. 7)

Among all of these tensions and issues it seems Medea is presented as reacting to the conditions of her world. In The Lost Hero (Riordan, 2010b), Medea goes on to defend some of her supposed crimes against the Jason of traditional Greek myth, (who is most famed for accepting the quest to obtain the Golden Fleece (Hamilton, 1969, p.162)), as Piper recounts Medea’s villainous acts in traditional Greek myths to the other demigod protagonists, Jason Grace and Leo Valdez, who are both under Medea’s spell:

“Guys,” Piper said. “The original Jason left Medea because she was crazy and bloodthirsty.”
“Lies!” Medea said.

“On the way back from Colchis, Jason’s ship landed at another kingdom, and Jason agreed to dump Medea and marry the king’s daughter.”

“After I bore him two children!” Medea said. “Still he broke his promise! I ask you, was that right?”

Jason and Leo dutifully shook their heads, but Piper wasn’t through.

“It may not have been right,” she said, “but neither was Medea’s revenge. She murdered her own children to get back at Jason. She poisoned his new wife and fled the kingdom.”

Medea snarled. “An invention to ruin my reputation! The people of Corinth—that unruly mob—killed my children and drove me out. Jason did nothing to protect me. He robbed me of everything. So yes, I sneaked back into the palace and poisoned his lovely new bride. It was only fair—a suitable price.”

“You’re insane,” Piper said.

“I am the victim!” Medea wailed. “I died with my dreams shattered, but no longer. I know now not to trust heroes.” (p. 311)

Once the debate ends, Medea attempts to capture the demigods, proving that she is a character who must be defeated by the heroes. So, in the cases of both Medea and Medusa, in Riordan’s series, the characters or narration acknowledge the potentially biased perception of these female mythic figures, but still the negative perceptions prove true as the stories progress.

Both Medea and a version of Medusa are also re-presented in Ross Collins’s middle grade illustrated novel, Medusa Jones (2008). This novel is not an official part of
my sample of children’s novels because it is supposedly set in Athens in ancient Greece, but includes many anachronisms in the technology presented, the vocabulary used and in the modernized characterizations. I include it in this analysis to provide a contrast to Riordan’s approach of positioning these mythic figures and I include it as an example of a novel that ignores the historical weight of the mythic figures included. Collins’s protagonist is Medusa Jones, who, along with her friend Mino the Minotaur—also very different from the monster of tradition—and Chiron the centaur—traditionally a teacher to the heroes—are bullied by the “Champions,” a clique of other kids; the heroes Theseus, Perseus and Cassandra.

The Champions’ behavior is normalized within the anachronistic school system of the story by their teacher, Miss Medea, who as with the case of most traditional presentations of myths that include her and Riordan’s re-presentation of her in *The Lost Hero* (2010b), is portrayed as an antagonist. In *Medusa Jones*, Medea is described as “the palest woman in town. She permanently looked as if someone had just told her that her cat had died—tragically” (p. 53, Figure 9).
Meda sends her students to camp on Mount Olympus alone (p. 73). She also almost calls Medusa and her friends Mino and Chiron “freaks” multiple times, but only gets as far as the “frea—” (pp. 54, 70).

As for the protagonist, Medusa Jones, she and her parents all have serpents for hair. They work to control their curse and try not to turn people they look upon to stone. But Medusa Jones’s Gran, supposedly the original Medusa from traditional myth, is “insane and lives in a cave” (p. 3). This places the events of Medusa Jones within the myth-making world of an Ancient Greece that is not completely historical or allegorical, but is also not completely modernized or established as following the traditional patterns of the mythic figures’ characterizations.

The fact that Medusa’s father also has snakes for hair implies that Medusa’s position as an outsider, or her mark or curse is less focused on gender than in Springer’s re-presentation in Dusssie (2007). When the Champions tease and call Medusa Jones and
her friends freaks, they focus on the fact that they are physically marked as different from other characters, contributing to their positions as outsiders (Figure 10).

Figure 10:

**Mino, Chiron, Medusa and her dog from Medusa Jones, p. 92** (Collins 2008, p. 92)

Young Medusa wishes to be normal and after seeing a sign on a store, stating, “Fed up with YOU?...A New You is just a snip away!” (p. 28), she goes to a faux-French speaking stylist, named Monsieur Josef, hoping to get a makeover:

“And wat do you want of me?” asked Monsieur Josef, transfixed by the headsnakes.

“I want what the sign says,” Medusa answered. “A new me, please.”

“But zees ees an original,” said Monsieur Josef. “Why would you change zees?”

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“I’m sick of being an original,” said Medusa. “I want something normal.” (p. 32) After the makeover proves impossible, Medusa and her friends go on a camping trip to Mount Olympus (alluded to earlier in this section) and must rescue the Champions, causing Medusa to accept herself for who she is and learn that “nobody’s perfect” (p. 137) just after she intentionally turns the Champions to stone after they are ungrateful to her and her friends for saving them and refer to them as “freaks” (p. 135). While still an outsider marked and positioned as different from others, Medusa is no longer alone in her difference and, in this middle grade novel, the meanings a reader may take away from Medusa’s experiences are messages of acceptance, perseverance or empowerment.

The re-presentations of the heroes and monsters in Medusa Jones challenge or ignore the way these characters are traditionally presented. The heroes Perseus or Theseus that listeners, readers or watchers have rooted for throughout the centuries are re-presented as bullies. The sometimes pitiable monsters Medusa and the Minotaur are the relatable characters. The only mythic figure that is consistently re-presented negatively, both in Medusa Jones (2008) and in Riordan’s heroes of Olympus series (2010b) is Medea. Each reader must decide for herself how she feels about these inclusions of mythic figures, whether they long for the consistency of traditional portrayals or yearn for more sympathetic re-presentations.
Cause-Driven Significance: Doing good and environmental conservation

It is not just individual mythic figures or the traditional myths themselves that are given modern significance in my sample of re-presentations, but present-day concerns are also woven into the novels. Many of the novels within the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s literature included themes about what it means to do good in a community, world or for the environment.

The cause to do good.

Since Alexandra Adornetto’s young adult paranormal romance Halo (2010) is narrated from the point of view of an angel who is visiting Earth for the first time, she is positioned as an outsider who regularly critiques modern Western culture. She and her sibling angels, Ivy and Gabriel, discuss their dislike for technology:

Compared to the rest of the community we lived like Quakers: no television, computers, or cell phones. Our only concession to living on earth in the twenty-first century was the landline phone, which had been connected just after we moved in. We thought of technology as a sort of corrupting influence, promoting antisocial behavior and detracting from family values. Our home was a place where we spent time with one another, not whiling away time shopping on the Internet or watching mindless television programs. Gabriel particularly hated the influence of television. During the preparation for our mission, he had shown us the beginning of a program to emphasize his point.
It involved a group of people struggling with obesity being divided into groups and presented with tempting food to see if they were strong enough to resist. The ones who gave in were berated and shunned. It was disgusting, Gabriel said, to play with people’s emotions and prey on their weaknesses. It was even more sickening that the general public considered such cruelty *entertainment*. (p. 101, emphasis present in text)

Such critiques allow readers used to similar forms of entertainment to examine their own culture from a different position and see from Bethany’s perspective.

Instead of solely giving criticisms, these comments can become calls to action. As her part in restoring humanity’s faith in each other and in the Judeo-Christian God, Bethany’s sister, Ivy, works for a church group, advocating causes. Bethany narrates:

She had joined the church group and was already recruiting members. She had made badges promoting fair trade and printed pamphlets that preached about the injustice of working conditions in the Third World. Given her goddess status within Venus Cove, the numbers at the church group were growing. The young males in the town had taken to seeking her out and buying far more badges than anyone could use in the hope of being rewarded with her phone number or even just an appreciative pat on the head. Ivy had made it her mission to play Mother Earth at Venus Cove—she wanted to bring people back to nature, I guess you could call it an environmentalist mentality—organic food, community spirit, and the power of the natural world over material things. (p. 125)

This draws attention to concerns beyond ones strictly of faith and explores the good the characters do and positions the reader to consider similar possibilities. This also occurs
in Carrie Jones’s Need series (2009, 2010a, 2010b). The protagonist Zara regularly participates in the organization Amnesty International’s calls for action. She reflects upon the way people who are trying to do good throughout the world are persecuted and she draws strength from those narratives to try to do good herself or to better understand the complicated relationship between good and evil. For example, in the third novel in the series, *Entice* (2010b), she begins to realize that pixies are like humans in that they are capable of doing both good and bad. After learning that a pixie king she has trusted, Astley, is responsible for the death of his former pixie queen, she draws upon what she learned from an Amnesty International report to try to understand pixies like Astley and her own biological pixie father, who has captured and killed teenage boys to sustain his own life only to later sacrifice himself for Zara. She narrates:

> Back in 2004, this forty-nine-year-old guy Ye Guozhu was sentenced to prison in China because he applied to demonstrate against forced evictions. The court said he was “picking quarrels and stirring up trouble.” He was upset because people’s homes and businesses were being destroyed so that fancy places could be built. His restaurant was one of those buildings. His home was another. The government didn’t give the people any money. They just evicted them. According to Amnesty, he was tortured. The police beat him before his trial, suspended him from the ceiling, hung him by his arms. According to Amnesty, the police used electroshock batons.

These are the sorts of things out-of-control pixies would do, but worse…even worse. How can I imagine worse? I don’t have to imagine it. I saw it when I rescued Jay Dahlberg [a teenage boy] from my father’s lair. But pixies can do
Both Astley’s dad and mine sacrificed themselves for us, and can there be a higher good than that? (pp. 172-173)

Zara is motivated to participate in social movements through Amnesty International and to contemplate the moral and ethical implications of what good and evil are. While she and her friends initially justify imprisoning all pixies they encounter, she later discerns that this is a bigoted reaction and that, like people, pixies are likewise complicated creatures, capable of both good and evil. The Need series explores both social causes and issues of bigotry and hierarchies of status among humans, pixies and were-animals. After she has been transformed into a pixie, Zara debates with her friend Devyn, a were-eagle, whether her status as a human and rights as a person are changed:

“I’m hardly good, Devyn. We trapped people in a house. That’s illegal. It’s technically kidnapping. We fight them. That’s assault. I beat one guy up after the dance. Plus those two girls…”

“Pixies, not people. Pixies, not girls,” he corrects.

Pixies, not people.

“I still feel like a person, and I don’t feel good. Fighting makes me feel evil,” I mumble.

Devyn gathers his stuff up to leave.

“Seriously though,” I continue, more forcefully. “Do I have fewer rights, less importance because I’m not a human? Do the laws suddenly not apply to me?” Animals don’t have rights,” Devyn snaps. “And that’s what I am half the time. I can’t even begin to imagine what would happen if regular people suddenly knew that people like me were out there.”

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“How would you like it if people called you a shifter or a were instead of a guy?”

He cracks his knuckles and slugs on his backpack. He grimaces as he straightens his back. “I would hate that.”

“So you understand why I hate it?”

“I do.” Rubbing a hand across his face, he steps toward the door. “I’m sorry, Zara. It’s just so much to get used it.” (p. 37)

Zara’s contemplation about how violence may be justified by assigning a group lower status or position is allegorical for the hierarchies historically and presently attributed to tensions of race, religion, class, gender, disability experience, etc.

The cause of environmental conservation.

Also notable among causes is the concern over the environmental well-being of the planet. This theme is present in Sarwat Chadda’s Devil’s Kiss series and Riordan’s Percy Jackson series.

In the second novel of the Devil’s Kiss series, Dark Goddess (Chadda, 2010), environmental issues are considered and the antagonist, the mythic figure Baba Yaga, is motivated to destroy humanity due to its negative impact on the Earth. A young girl named Vasilisa, who had been briefly possessed by Baba Yaga describes the mythic figure’s motivation to the protagonist, Billi:

“Baba Yaga hates us, Billi. For all the damage we’ve done.”

“What sort of damage?”

“She wants the Earth back to how it was before men came. She feels the Earth;
she feels it like it’s her. Every time we dig mines we’re cutting her skin. When we put our garbage in the sea we’re pouring poison in her mouth. We make her sick.” Vasilisa held up the figurine, turning it toward the moonlight.

“You know that from her mind?” Vasilisa spoke with such simple clarity, Billi could almost see Baba Yaga’s point. (p. 89)

Billi acknowledges that there is truth to Baba Yaga’s position toward humanity and the reader may do the same. But still, Billi works to stop the ancient witch, knowing that her plan to cause a volcanic winter would destroy all of humanity.

The Percy Jackson series provides a more optimistic critique of humanity’s maltreatment of the environment and natural resources. Throughout the series, Percy travels underwater, in the realm of the sea god Poseidon, his father. Almost every time he dives into the Mississippi River (2005), the Hudson (2009) or another waterway, pollutants are mentioned. In the final novel of the Percy Jackson series, The Last Olympian (2009), Percy goes underwater to speak to the New York river gods to try to enlist their help for an approaching battle against the god Kronos and his forces. As Percy walks into the water of the Hudson Bay, he cautions the reader:

Just for you non-sea-god types out there, don’t go swimming in New York Harbor. It may not be as filthy as it was in my mom’s day, but that water will still probably make you grow a third eye or have mutant children when you grow up. (p. 177)

This directly addresses the polluted condition of the rivers. Pollution continues to be the focus of the scene, because to enlist the help of the Hudson and East River gods to fend off Kronos, Percy splits a magical sand dollar that has the power to wash away pollutants:
A ripple of clean fresh water spread out from the break [in the sand dollar], as if all the pollution in the bay were being dissolved.

“You each get half,” I said. “In exchange, you keep all of Kronos’s forces away from Manhattan.”

“Oh, man,” Hudson whimpered, reaching out for the sand dollar. “It’s been so long since I was clean.”

“The power of Poseidon,” East River murmured. “He’s a jerk, but he sure knows how to sweep pollution away.” (pp. 179-180)

In this scene the river gods clearly show that they wish for their rivers to be cleared of pollutants, sending an environmental message to the reader. This passage also demonstrates how a god or one of his magical objects can help improve the environmental state of the world. A magical object of a sea god, however, does not present a way for the reader to help improve the environment. Rather, in the Percy Jackson series that suggestion comes from the missing god of the wild, Pan.

Percy’s friend Grover, a satyr who desires to search for the god Pan throughout the series, finds him in the great labyrinth that runs beneath the United States during the events of the fourth novel in the series, The Battle of the Labyrinth (2008a). Pan’s absence throughout the plots of the first three novels suggests that there are few wild places left on Earth. But when he is found, Pan’s significance is expanded beyond the realm of the wild. When Grover and Percy find Pan hidden in one of the many rooms of the great labyrinth, he is close to death, but the mythic figure manages to deliver a message to Grover:

“My dear satyr,” Pan said kindly, “will you carry my message?”
“I—I can’t.”

“You can,” Pan said. “You are the strongest and bravest. Your heart is true. You have believed in me more than anyone ever has, which is why you must bring the message, and why you must be the first to release me.”

“I don’t want to.”

“I know,” the god said. “But my name, Pan…originally it meant rustic. Did you know that? But over the years it has come to mean all. The spirit of the wild must pass to all of you now. You must tell each one you meet: if you would find Pan, take up Pan’s spirit. Remake the wild, a little at a time, each in your own corner of the world. You cannot wait for anyone else, even a god, to do that for you.”

Grover wiped his eyes. Then slowly he stood. “I’ve spent my whole life looking for you. Now…I release you.” (p. 316, emphasis present in text)

Pan directly acknowledges the way the meaning of a word can change over time. He calls for this shift in meaning to have a significance in action: People are to be responsible for returning the wild, returning nature, to the world. Each individual may take up the cause of being responsible for the environment and working to restore the wildness of nature.

By the end of The Battle of the Labyrinth, and despite the fact that his intentions are to honor another character he likes, Percy plants a sprig of moonlace from the mythic figure Calypso outside the window of his mother’s New York City apartment, exemplifying this environmental responsibility for the reader (p. 360). The series presents pollution, deforestation, etc. as mythic concerns, ones that people must work
together to solve. This is one of the many ways traditional myth may take up the needs, concerns and fears of the present and future.

**Nationalistic Ideology and New Myth: The presentation of America as powerful and of historic Americans as gods**

Within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels there are present-day ideological implications about the nations within which the books are set. This has been a practice in traditional folklore. When Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, for example, began collecting and recording the stories of Catherine Wild, her children, and other families, mainly from bourgeois or educated middle class backgrounds, the brothers were concerned with restoring Germanic folk traditions (Kamenetsky, 1992, 1988; Zipes, 1991, p. 47). Their interest corresponds with “the awakening Romantic interest of the native language, law, and history, for which the ground had already been prepared by Johann Gottfried Herder. The growing national consciousness in Germany created a climate that favored their search for native roots” (1992, p. 25). There was a growing movement to discover Germanic roots and to claim a sense of “Germanism,” with folklore. Zipes writes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1991) about the Grimm brothers’ intentions while collecting folktales:

Their intentions were honorable: they wanted the rich cultural tradition of the common people to be used and accepted by the rising middle classes. It is for this reason that they spent their lives conducting research on myths, customs, and the language of the German people. They wanted to foster the development of a
strong national bourgeoisie by unravelling the ties to Germanic traditions and social rites and by drawing on related lore from France and central and northern Europe. Wherever possible, they sought to link the beliefs and behavior of characters in the folk tales to the cultivation of bourgeois norms. (p. 47)

The Grimms hoped to create narratives for a German middle class, to set the status of the German people who heard and read the folktales as equal to those from other European countries.

In the case of Herder and the Grimms, the ascribed ideological implications of myth and folktales were being implemented to invoke a sense of class and nationalism. They were motivated by patriotism in their narrative studies. Christa Kamenetsky, who has written extensively about the Grimm Brothers, notes their desire for “national unity” but also adds, “it was well-motivated within the political context of their time” (1992, p. 59). Such a note is necessary, because when the Nazis gained power in Germany later they wished “to continue the legacy of Johann Gottfried Herder and the Brothers Grimm” (1992, pp. 241-242). While instituting nationwide folklore curricular reforms the Nazis expressed renewed interest in folklore, not “in a search for national roots,” or for the glorification of the past, but rather “for the sake of ideological goals aimed at building the National Socialist future” (p. 242). The Nazis sought to prove “the Nordic origins of all German folk traditions” (1988, p. 260). Zipes also notes, that under Nazi power, folktales were considered holy or sacred Aryan relics and the fairy tales of the Grimms and others “were promoted as ideal on recommended reading lists for children” (1991, p. 139). While none of these were the Grimms’ goals, their research would later be a source for a Nazi argument:
Their [The Grimms’s] etymological and comparative law and literature studies did supply them with ample evidence of a close cultural interrelationship of such countries of the “German North” as the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, England, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. In many folktale variants of these countries, they would often detect the Edda or the Sagas as the common source. (Kamenetsky, 1988, p. 260)

By claiming this common source for the Germanic folktales, the Nazis were, by extension, claiming a certain status and connection to a mythic past, positioning themselves within a larger dialogue in which they may have otherwise been denied a place.

This is not the only time or place in which myth has been ascribed such power. Turning to a more recent example and to the fantasy works of Tolkien, Jane Chance (2004) writes:

It has become well known among scholars that Tolkien yearned to create a “mythology for England” that would accomplish for his country what mythologies had done for other countries such as Greece, Italy, Iceland, and Norway: create a religious pantheon of the gods attached to a creational act of genesis that functioned as an expression of national origin and identity. (p. 1)

Arguably, there are early twenty-first century young adult and middle grade children’s novels that may do the same for the United States, including some of the novels within my sample.

Returning to Riordan’s The Lightning Thief (2005) as an example, Percy learns that the gods of myth do exist. His teacher, Chiron, explains their influence upon
Western culture:

“Come now, Percy. What you call ‘Western civilization.’ Do you think it’s just an abstract concept? No, it’s a living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years. The gods are part of it. You might even say they are the source of it, or at least, they are tied so tightly to it that they couldn’t possibly fade, not unless all of Western civilization were obliterated. The fire started in Greece. Then, as you well know—or as I hope you know, since you passed my course—the heart of the fire moved to Rome, and so did the gods. Oh, different names, perhaps—Jupiter for Zeus, Venus for Aphrodite, and so on—but the same forces, the same gods.”

“And then they died.”

“Died? No. Did the West die? The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while. Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there. They spent several centuries in England. All you need to do is look at the architecture. People do not forget the gods. Every place they’ve ruled, for the last three thousands years, you can see them in paintings, in statues, on the most important buildings. And yes, Percy, of course they are now in your United States. Look at your symbol, the eagle of Zeus.

Look at the statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center, the Greek facades of your government buildings in Washington. I defy you to find any American city where the Olympians are not prominently displayed in multiple places. Like it or not—and believe me, plenty of people weren’t very fond of Rome, either—America is now the heart of the flame. It is the great power of the West. And so Olympus is
By proclaiming that the Greek gods live in the United States, the “heart of the flame,” the United States is positioned in a “superior” spot of centrality, over other Western nations. Chiron’s explanation also completely ignores any position Eastern nations and other cultures’ myths have in developing American culture and architecture. Despite the fact that much of this country’s mythic history is missing, this does innovate one branch of traditional myths to be seen in a new light.

Percy is granted a quest that takes him across the country to Los Angeles. As Percy and his friends, Annabeth and Grover, travel by train to St. Louis, Percy notes the “dark fields of Ohio” and “golden mountains” before they pass over the Mississippi River (p. 201). Once in St. Louis, at Annabeth’s urging, they travel to the top of the Gateway Arch, a famous landmark. While this decision is explained by Annabeth’s desire to become an architect, it also exposes the reader to an American monument. Similarly, in Denver, the “Rocky Mountains seemed to be staring” at Percy (p. 219). While these geographical descriptions may merely provide the settings of the novel, these additions could also be seen as promoting the landmarks and landscape of the United States. As the series continues, Percy and his friends visit Las Vegas (2005), the Bermuda Triangle (2006), Washington D.C. (2007), the Hoover Dam (2007), the Sierra Mountains (2007), Mt. St. Helen’s (2008a), Alcatraz Prison (2008a), Carlsbad Caverns (2008a), San Francisco (2007, 2008a), among other places. (Similarly, Riordan’s Kane Chronicles (2010a) and Heroes of Olympus (2010b) series add Phoenix, New Orleans, Detroit, among others to the list.)

Riordan has commented that the Percy Jackson series contains a nationalistic
ideology. He writes in the introduction to *Demigods and Monsters* (2008b) that:

> Myths aren’t something that happened in the past, either. We didn’t leave them behind with the Bronze Age. We are still creating myths all the time. My books, among other things, explore the myth of America as the beacon of civilization, the myth of New York, and the myth of the American teenager. (p. ix)

This not only creates a sense of a nationalistic American myth, but it also claims the ancient Greek deities as somehow being “American.” It puts the present-day country in conversation with an ancient powerful culture, sharing its past and status. This, I believe, is a unique ability of myth when it is incorporated into literature.

Of course, other mythic systems have contributed to what it is to be “American,” why are they excluded from the Percy Jackson series? Shouldn’t Native American beliefs help capture a sense of America? What about the influence Christianity, Judaism, Aztec knowledge, etc. have historically had on this country? This stream of questions could go on and on.

Riordan has addressed some of these issues. In the companion series to Percy Jackson, *Heroes of Olympus* (2010b), one of the series’ protagonists, Piper, whose paternal family is Cherokee, draws parallels between the Greek myths and Cherokee beliefs as the protagonists learn of the different influences of the Greek and Roman gods throughout the novel. (For a more detailed discussion of this, see Chapter Six).

Riordan also extends this sense of nationalism into his Egyptian myth series, the *Kane Chronicles*. Generally speaking, this series has a broader international emphasis, the protagonists, siblings Carter and Sadie Cane, view the Egyptian influences upon American culture. In the first novel, *The Red Pyramid* (2010a), the siblings seek refuge
from monsters and magicians in the Washington Monument, which is referred to as “the biggest obelisk ever constructed” and as “the largest single source of Egyptian power in North America” (p. 239).

Although I focused upon the way the nationalism of the United States was incorporated into my sample, with a few of the series, it is possible to do an analysis of other countries’ sense of nationalism and contemplation over their nationalistic future. For example, the future of Ireland is explored in both Wood’s Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy (2007, 2008, 2009) and in Thompson’s the New Policeman trilogy (2007, 2008, 2010). Both series express a tension between Ireland’s rich tradition in folklore and its future in the global community. In *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* (Wood, 2006) Colin, an Irish tour guide and Morgan’s eventual boyfriend, does not believe in the faeries that Morgan is learning are real. He sees Ireland’s future as lying in a different direction:

> “Technology, Mor. The Internet. That’s the economy of the future.” He tapped the unlit cigarette on the dash before sticking it in the lighter. “All over the country the high-tech companies are starting up and the folks who get in on the ground floor are doing very well for themselves, very well indeed. It’s the new Ireland.”

I wasn’t sure what any of this had to do with faeries, but Colin wasn’t finished yet.

> “Don’t get me wrong. I love this bloody country, as much as any man can love a country, and that’s the truth. But it’s the new Ireland I want to be a part of. We can’t survive on tourist dollars forever.” The cigarette was lit and he blew smoke
out his window. “No offense to you and yours: Your dollars are much appreciated and ta very much. But why should we get stuck running the Tinker Bell exhibit whilst India and China and everywhere else gets to use their bloody brains to make a living?” (pp. 80-81, emphasis present in text)

Colin argues that his country is transitioning to be competitive in the technological global market, a change he favors.

In *The New Policeman* (Thompson, 2007) this conflict between tradition and change is expressed as a tension of maintaining the Irish musical tradition and in terms of religious belief. Father Doherty is a Catholic priest who has been stuck in the fairy realm for several generations and is attempting to destroy it to stop its influence upon the Irish people. As the novel’s antagonist, he informs the protagonist, J.J., of his plan for Ireland:

“I have a vision for Ireland,” he went on. “I see a God-fearing Catholic nation peopled by industrious citizens, each one of them determined to put the old, feckless ways behind them. I see an Ireland where every man has a motorcar and spends his time improving his lot and the lot of his family, instead of wasting his days growing potatoes and his nights drinking and dancing. I see an Ireland that has grown wealthy and taken its rightful place among the great states of Europe.”

“But all of that has happened already,” said J.J.

“Already?”

“You should see Ireland now, Father. No one sees fairies anymore. They don’t even believe in them.” (p. 357)

In the conclusion of the novel, Father Doherty’s attempt to destroy the mythic realm of Tír na nÓg is thwarted and the musical tradition is maintained. With similar messages
delivered by characters positioned both as good and bad, examining the way a sense of Irish nationalism is included reveals a complex view of possibilities for the country’s future and the reality that some traditions have been lost to compete in a global market.

**New gods and myths.**

The construction of nationalism extends beyond the monuments and geography of the United States. In Riordan’s Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), famous Americans are also claimed to be the descendents of the Greek gods. For example in the fourth novel of the series, *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, Harriet Tubman is referred to as being a descendent of Hermes (2008a, p. 228). In *The Last Olympian*, a statue of William H. Steward, a former governor of New York, is mentioned as having been a “minor demigod—son of Hebe [goddess of youth]” (2009, p. 174). This elevates national figures, empowering and connecting them with the authority and tradition of the Greek gods.

Similarly, in *The Red Pyramid* (Riordan, 2010a), Carter and Sadie are sent to Graceland, the former home of Elvis Presley as a test by Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom. At first the siblings are surprised to have been sent there. Sadie questions, “You’re telling me Elvis was a magician?” and her brother replies, “Don’t know…Thoth did say something about music being a kind of magic” (p. 297). A man who became a popular culture icon is given magical properties, implying that he is more than just an ordinary man.

Riordan used a similar technique when he conceptualized and began the middle
grade, multimedia, 39 Clues series (Carman, 2009, Korman, 2008, 2010; Haddix, 2010; Lerangis, 2009, 2010; Park, 2010; Riordan, 2008c; Watson, 2009a, 2009b), in which seven authors wrote the ten books that make up the international scavenger hunt. In that series, many internationally famous historic people are re-presented as being related, members of the Cahill family and its four branches that were created by four siblings in the sixteenth century. In the first novel in the series, the only one written by Riordan, *The Maze of Bones* (2008c), an international clue hunt is established for eleven-year-old Dan Cahill and his fourteen-year-old sister, Amy, to participate with other family members after Grace Cahill’s death. Unlike many of the other books in the series, the focus of Riordan’s novel is on an American historic figure, Benjamin Franklin. The siblings discuss Franklin’s accomplishments. Amy begins:

“…The thing is Franklin was famous for a lot of reasons. He started out getting rich with his printing business. Then he became a scientist and invented a bunch of stuff. Later he helped write the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He was even an ambassador to England and France. He was brilliant. World famous. Everybody liked him, and he lived until he was, like, in his eighties.”

“Superman,” Dan said.

“Pretty much.”

“So do you think he knew what it was—this treasure we’re looking for?”

Amy hadn’t thought of that. Franklin had been one of the most influential people in history. If he was a Cahill, and he knew about this secret family treasure…

“I think,” she said, “we’d better find out.” (89, emphasis present in text)
Later in the novel, Amy also thinks, “She’d spent several hours reading about Benjamin Franklin, and she was more convinced than ever that he was the most amazing person who ever lived. To think she might be related to him made her so proud” (pp. 120-121). As with the Percy Jackson series, Riordan’s characters feel empowered by their familial relationships. What is more, the description of Benjamin Franklin as a “superman” positions another historic American figure as privileged and powerful. This contributes to a sense of nationalism across Riordan’s books for children and young adults.

In Katherine’s Marsh’s *The Night Tourist* (2007) its sequel *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009) and Scott Mebus’s Gods of Manhattan trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010) historic New York City figures are included as characters. In Marsh’s young adult novels, the New York City dead live in the Underworld guarded by Cerberus, the three-headed dog famous for this same job in traditional Greek myth (Hamilton, 1969, p. 43) and live with real figures from the city’s history, such as manners expert Emily Post, mentalist Washington Irving Bishop, police commissioner during the 1950s, Stephen Kennedy, and corrupt cop Clubber Williams, etc. *The Night Tourist* (2007) and *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009) share the history of the famed city while also exploring tensions of choosing to live or die with a mythic dimension structuring the world of the story.

In the sequel, *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009), the dead are encouraged to fear the one living boy who can see them, Jack Perdu, both novels’ protagonist. When the dead learn that Jack has returned to the underworld even though he is alive, they refer to him as the “Living Avenger” (p. 82) and the city authorities establish “Living Threat Levels” (p. 204) to caution the dead of potential danger in similar fashion to terrorist threat levels that Americans have regularly endured since the September 11th, 2001 attacks in New
York City and Washington D.C. In Marsh’s young adult novels, since the reader is positioned with Jack’s perspective, she knows he is not a threat to the other characters.

Although not subtly addressing any terrorist attacks on American soil, Mebus’s Gods of Manhattan trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010) takes the inclusion of New York City historic figures further to the point of American forefather worship. Deceased New Yorkers remembered for specific skills, jobs or other aspects of their lives become gods of the city in the mythic realm of Mannahatta. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Hex, a sorcerer, explains the process that elevates mortals to godhood:

“When a mortal does something great, he is reborn in Mannahatta as a spirit. If his legend grows enough, he might be fortunate enough to ascend to godhood. Of course, it all depends on what they’re remembered for. Mannahatta is littered with the spirits of famous gangsters, so very few of them become gods, since there’s room for only so many gods of crime. But there aren’t many contenders for the job of God of Alternate Side of the Street Parking, which is how Alan Tuddle rose to the position simply by being remembered as the guy who always got a spot. All told, there are thousands of gods here in Mannahatta, on top of hundreds of thousands of spirits, not to mention all the other creatures lurking about. They all have jobs to do—making sure Manhattan keeps sailing along smoothly, spiritually speaking. Though some work harder than others.” (2008, p. 68)

It is through being remembered that historical figures become more than mortals. They become gods, guarding and promoting aspects of life that are common across cultures or are specific to city life, like having to alternate parking on the sides of streets. These
inclusions of historic figures elevate American history and specifically New York City to the realm of myth. These presentations of historic figures within mythic narratives and contexts may lead to the creation of *new myths*, that specially deal with community-based and nationalistic powers and positions since they elevate men and women beyond the scope of humanity.

In *Dark Goddess* (Chadda, 2010), the second novel in the young adult Devil’s Kiss series, the way a person may be elevated to godhood in narratives over time is discussed among the modern-day Knights Templar as they confer about the mythic figure Baba Yaga, an ancient witch who still clings to power within the story.

“And the goddess? Who is she?” asked Mordred.

“Gaia. Hecate. Morrigan. Isis,” said Elaine with a shrug. “She’s the goddess of nature, the wild, and of magic. She’s been revered since prehistoric times, and each culture had a different name for her. But the Polenitsy [an organization of werewolves] call her by her old, old name.” Elaine looked around the circle. Baba Yaga.”

“But she’s just a name from fairy tales,” said Mordred. “She’s not real.”

“No, she’s real, all right. An ancient, wise, and very evil old witch.” Elaine’s eyes narrowed as she observed the young squire. “And once people worshipped her as much as we do our gods now.”

“The tales must have begun with someone, I suppose,” said Gareth.

Elaine nodded. “Imagine someone coming to your tribe. She can control the elements. Read minds and speak with the animals. Heal injuries with a touch. What would you think?”
“You’d think she was a god,” agreed Mordred reluctantly.

Elaine pointed at the crucifix on the far wall. “Is her story so different from his?”

Arthur snorted. “You’re saying Baba Yaga is like Jesus? You’re going to burn in Hell for that, Elaine.”

“Time passes,” continued Elaine. “Baba Yaga’s powers wane. The new religion rises, Christianity, and together with advancing civilization it drives her deeper into the wilderness. Year by year, century by century, people forget. Only a few still remember the old religion, and among them are the Polenitsy. They feed her the souls of the Spring Children [sacrificing people with psychic powers]; she absorbs their powers, memories, and lives and is kept going, weak and decrepit, but alive.” (pp. 36-37)

In this re-presentation of Baba Yaga a number of traditional goddesses are combined into one figure, creating a position that unites various cultures’ myths into a monomyth. As stories are created about people or characters, they may be positioned in different ways, positioned with different amounts of power. Only the passing of time and the sharing of different stories reveal who or what will be positioned as gods and become new myth. The idealization of people from history or ascribing them privileged status—as occurs in Mebus, Marsh, Riordan and other children’s novels within this sample is one way to begin elevating new gods and new myths.

**Democratic myths.**

overarching tension of the series is a call for equal and democratic representation. Although there are many more gods and goddesses, traditionally, twelve Greek Olympian gods hold most of the power, a tendency embodied in the way Riordan re-presents the Greek gods in the modern United States: At Camp Half-Blood, a safe-haven for the half-human sons and daughters of the gods, there are only twelve cabins for the campers to live in, those of the Olympians, or the twelve main ruling gods (2005, p. 80-81). In *The Lightning Thief* (2005), Percy learns that the children of all other gods are housed in Cabin Eleven, the cabin honoring the messenger god, Hermes, since he is the god of “travelers.” Luke, one of the sons of Hermes tells Percy, “Messengers. Medicine. Travelers, merchants, thieves. Anybody who uses the roads. That’s why you’re here, enjoying cabin eleven’s hospitality. Hermes isn’t picky about who he sponsors” (2005, p. 101). In response to this statement, Percy narrates, “I figured Luke didn’t mean to call me a nobody” (p. 101), implying that Luke’s language choices position Percy to feel under-valued. Percy and other unclaimed children of the gods may feel as though they are less-than the others, as though they are unclaimed wanderers.

In *The Last Olympian* (2009), the final novel in the Percy Jackson series, some of the children of the less powerful gods reveal why they and their parents fight for the god Kronos, who wishes to usurp power from his children, Zeus, Poseidon and the rest of the twelve Olympian gods. The character Ethan Nakamura is a son of Nemesis, the “Goddess of Revenge” (Riordan, 2008, p. 302). He fights and dies on Kronos’s side of the war hoping that his mother will have more of a voice among the gods. His dying words are, “‘Deserve better,’” he gasped. “‘If they just…had thrones—’” (p. 328). He wants his mother to have a voice, to have an equal place and to hold power among the
gods. (This is not so dissimilar from the Monkey King’s own goal in the beginning of Yang’s *American Born Chinese* (2006).)

At the heart of the rebellion is this issue of equal representation. When the war ends at the conclusion of *The Last Olympian* (2009), Percy stands before the twelve Olympian gods and advocates for those who have rebelled against them:

“Kronos couldn’t have risen if it hadn’t been for a lot of demigods who felt abandoned by their parents,” I said. “They felt angry, resentful, and unloved, and they had a good reason.”

Zeus’s royal nostrils flared. “You dare accuse—”

“No more undetermined children,” I said. “I want you to promise to claim your children—all your demigod children by the time they turn thirteen. They won’t be left out in the world on their own at the mercy of monsters. I want them claimed and brought to camp so they can be trained right, and survive.”

“Now wait just a moment,” Apollo said, but I was on a roll.

“And the minor gods,” I said. “Nemesis, Hecate, Morpheus, Janus, Hebe—they all deserve a general amnesty and a place at Camp Half-Blood. Their children shouldn’t be ignored. Calypso and the other peaceful Titan-Kind should be pardoned too. And Hades—”

“Are you calling me a minor god?” Hades bellowed.

“No, my lord,” I said quickly. “But your children should not be left out. They should have a cabin at camp. Nico [Hades’s son] has proven that. No unclaimed demigods will be crammed into the Hermes cabin anymore, wondering who their parents are. They’ll have their own cabins, for all the gods. …You’ve got to stop
trying to get rid of powerful demigods. We’re going to train them and accept
them instead. All children of the gods will be welcome and treated with respect.
That is my wish.” (pp. 353-354, emphasis present in text)

It is important to note that Percy does not plead for the gods themselves to be represented
on Olympus (such a shift would remap the power configuration of traditional Greek myth
and, as discussed with the shift in Medusa and Medea’s characterizations, Riordan is
conservative and does not venture too far from tradition in his re-presentations). Instead,
Percy only makes a request for their children, the mortal demigods like him, the
characters the young readers are most likely to relate to and that are solely Riordan’s
invention to play with. The young characters are to be welcomed, given homes,
protection and voices. The Percy Jackson series is a call for representation for all, the
powerful and the weak, for those who have the most potential to be left behind or
perceived and positioned as “less than.”

also plays with applying democracy to traditional myth. When Morgan faces the fairy
queen Titania who wishes to remove the veil between the fairy realms and the human
world, Morgan prevents her from doing this by campaigning against her for the position
of queen of the fairies, a position that in traditional myth as well as in the young adult
trilogy that has never before been chosen through election (2009, p. 229). Morgan asserts
the power for democratic choice by declaring that she is running against Titania:

I climbed on top of the low wall surrounding the pool and took a deep breath.
“Attention, citizens of all realms!” I yelled. “I, Morgan Rawlinson, hereby
declare my candidacy for Queen of the Faeries!”
Strangely, that’s all it took. The mere act of stepping out in front of the crowd and declaring myself was more than enough to make people pay attention. Call it a powerful yet totally democratic kind of magic. (2009, p. 228)

Soon news reporters, including CNN’s Anderson Cooper (p. 236), arrive to do election coverage and the series ends with a modernized democratic ascension to power.

Whether incorporating democratic approaches to power distribution or not, these authors give voice to mythic figures that could easily be lost and buried in the past. Here are arguments to acknowledge the lesser-known gods, to give them a place, in stories and beyond. In early twenty-first century children’s literature, the figures of myth are given new life and new significance in the modern world.

In this chapter, I have shown some of the feminist, environmental and nationalistic meanings myth may take up and carry. I have also demonstrated how new myths may emerge with some American historic figures. I would like to argue that there is also place for the gods and myths of other cultures as well, a space for more stories to flourish and be passed on, to be represented in the global, national and local positionings and understandings of the world and reality. All this leads to questions of authority: Which gods can be re-presented and which ones may interact with each other and with mortals? Should the gods of different mythic systems interact just as the people from different belief systems and cultural backgrounds interact? That is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Six: In which gods meet gods and the cultural ramifications

Gods of Manhattan trilogy
Guardian of the Dead
Heroes of Olympus series

Kane Chronicles
Percy Jackson series

“Manhattan has other problems. Other gods. It’s best we stay separate.”

~Uncle Amos
Rick Riordan, The Red Pyramid, 2010a, p. 52

As I examined the novels that comprised my sample, I noticed that while most of the books included mythic figures from one culture, others published between 2005 and 2010 attempted to create re-presentations that allowed the gods of one culture to mingle with those of another, representing a global and integrated view of the world and reality. But in the case of Rick Riordan’s several series—Percy Jackson, Kane Chronicles and Heroes of Olympus—he began by keeping the mythic systems separate, but has begun to expand and encourage characters, and by extension the reader, to see parallels among different cultures’ mythic systems. By closely examining these series’ approaches to inclusion and exclusion of mythic systems the reader may note a transition to a more global view of the overlaps and parallels among re-presented myth.
The Privileged and Unprivileged Mythic Systems in the Series by Rick Riordan

Since so many of the novels within my sample are written by Rick Riordan (Seven of the 40 novels or approximately 17.5% of my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels), it was hard not to note parallels and differences among his three series as I examined the way the gods are re-presented. In the Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), the Kane Chronicles (2010a) and the Heroes of Olympus (2010b) series, the protagonists learn that the gods of an ancient culture are real. These moments of introduction to and explanation of the mythic world and the way mythic realm intersects with and expands the protagonists’ reality is a formulaic motif in the first novel of each of Riordan’s series and in many of the other books within my sample. Yet, the differing details of the discussions the characters undergo portray varied meanings among the systems of myth being re-presented.

Re-presenting Greek and Egyptian myth.

I would like to compare the way Percy Jackson and Sadie and Carter Kane learn that the Greek and Egyptian mythic systems, respectively, are present within their world. The way these two mythic systems are re-presented in each series provides a striking contrast that demonstrates how Greek myths are often privileged over those of Egypt. Riordan published the Percy Jackson series first between 2005 and 2009. Throughout the series, Percy sees how the Greek world of myth has been mapped onto the present-day United States and learns of the ways Greek myth has influenced modern cultures. Most
of my examination of this series for this chapter is drawn from the first novel, *The Lightning Thief* (2005). *The Red Pyramid* (2010), the first novel in the Kane Chronicles and the only novel from it published within the timeframe of my sample, focuses on the gods of Egypt regaining power throughout the world.

In these two series, teacher figures, Chiron the centaur in the Percy Jackson series and Uncle Amos in the Kane Chronicles, explain to the protagonists, after they have had several encounters with creatures or gods of myth, that the gods of a specific culture still exist in the present-day world, that they survived through history in different ways (Table 13):
“…And then they [the Greek gods] died.”
“Died? No. Did the West die? The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while. Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there. They spent several centuries in England.”

“By the end of the ancient times, Egyptians had learned that their gods were not to be worshipped. They were powerful beings, primeval forces, but they are not divine in the sense one might think of God. They are created entities, like mortals, only much more powerful. We can respect them, fear them, use their power, or even fight them to keep them under control—“
“Fight gods?” Sadie interrupted.
“Constantly,” Amos assured her. “But we don’t worship them.” (emphasis present in text)

Table 13: Survival of the gods in Riordan’s novels

In the Percy Jackson series, the Greek gods moved from culture to culture, surviving in Western Culture and beyond their country of origin. They are always a light in the heart of Western Culture, wherever that may be. In contrast, the gods of Ancient Egypt are portrayed as malevolent in the Kane Chronicles. They are not to be worshipped or celebrated like the Greek gods, rather they are a force that must be controlled or battled.

Riordan’s Percy Jackson and Kane Chronicles novels also enumerate concrete and familiar ways Greek and Egyptian myth and culture still influence present-day America (Table 14):
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<td>73</td>
<td>“All you need to do is look at the architecture. People do not forget the gods. Every place they’ve ruled, for the last three thousands years, you can see them in paintings, in statues, on the most important buildings. And yes, Percy, of course they are now in your United States. Look at your symbol, the eagle of Zeus. Look at the statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center, the Greek facades of your government buildings in Washington. I defy you to find any American city where the Olympians are not prominently displayed in multiple places. Like it or not—and believe me, plenty of people weren’t very fond of Rome, either—America is now the heart of the flame. It is the great power of the West. And so Olympus is here. And we are here.”</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Look at the pyramid on the dollar bill. Look at the Washington Monument—the world’s largest Egyptian obelisk. Egypt is still very much alive. And so, unfortunately, are her gods.”</td>
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Table 14: Gods in the United States in Riordan’s Novels

The young protagonists, Percy, Sadie and Carter, and by extension the reader, are presented with concrete listings of the ways Ancient Greek and Ancient Egyptian cultures and myth have influenced American culture. This is similar to the explanations that often introduce sections on myth in literature textbooks (for more on this implication, see Chapter One).

Within the listing Chiron gives Percy in Table 14, the Greek gods are favored as a
source of strength and power as the United States is positioned as the center of modern Western culture. Multiple symbols, works of architecture and other works of art are delineated. In contrast, the Egyptian influence on symbols and architecture is noted, but the gods are negatively valued with the mention of their “unfortunate” presence, since they are associated with chaos and troublesome magic. Plus, only two Egyptian contributions to American culture are listed. From my perspective, these are unjust positions, since throughout both series there are both helpful and antagonistic gods in the re-presentations of each mythic system. It may be a valuable experience to ask why, with the use of this one motif within the works of a single author one culture’s gods are privileged and another’s are denigrated. Are these perceptions symptomatic of larger ideological stances towards these ancient cultures?

After discussing that the gods of myth exist, in *The Lightning Thief* (2005) and *The Red Pyramid* (2010a), Chiron and Uncle Amos describe the gods’ special relationship not only with the United State, but with Western Culture on the whole (Table 15):
“The fire [of Western Culture] started in Greece. Then, as you well know—or as I hope you know, since you passed my course—the heart of the fire moved to Rome, and so did the gods. Oh, different names, perhaps—Jupiter for Zeus, Venus for Aphrodite, and so on—but the same forces, the same gods.”

“The ancient Egyptians were not fools, Carter. They built the pyramids. They created the first great nation state. Their civilization lasted thousands of years.”

“Yeah,” I said. “And now they’re gone.”

Amos shook his head. “A legacy that powerful does not disappear. Next to the Egyptians, the Greeks and Romans were babies. Our modern nations like Great Britain and America? Blinks of an eye. The very oldest root of civilization, at least of Western civilization, is Egypt.

Table 15: The gods and Western Culture in Riordan’s Novels

Again, as an American reader, I felt as though I was expected to feel pride that the Greek gods had chosen my country to be the heart of Western civilization. But, this sentiment is put into a new perspective when paired with Uncle Amos’s lecture to Carter. The Ancient Egyptians sustained their culture and mythology far longer than the Ancient Greeks, Romans, British or Americans. Despite the fact that both of these ancient mythic systems are still influencing modern America, they are kept separate. Unlike the Percy Jackson series, which focuses solely on the Greek gods, the first novel of the Kane Chronicles briefly alludes to the presence of the Percy Jackson series as occurring within the same world, and by extension the Greek gods as co-habiting within this representation of the world and reality.
In *The Red Pyramid* (2010a), after Carter and Sadie learn that some of the gods of Egyptian myth have been unleashed into the modern world, and that their family still follows some Ancient Egyptian traditions, Uncle Amos, explains why the children must find safety in Brooklyn, on the East shore of New York City:

“And is this the east shore?” Sadie asked. “You said something about that in London—my grandparents living on the east shore.”

Amos smiled. “Yes. Very good, Sadie. In ancient times, the east bank of the Nile was always the side of the living, the side where the sun rises. The dead were buried west of the river. It was considered bad luck, even dangerous, to live there. The tradition is still strong among…our people.”

“Our people?” I asked, but Sadie muscled in with another question.

“So you can’t live in Manhattan?” she asked.

Amos’s brow furrowed as he looked across at the Empire State Building [the location of Mount Olympus in the Percy Jackson series]. “Manhattan has other problems. Other gods. It’s best we stay separate.” (pp. 51-52)

This passage serves as a brief acknowledgement of Riordan’s Percy Jackson series, that this series is set in the same world of myth and magic, but that these two mythic systems, cultures, book series, are to remain separate. Despite this caution against intermingling, later in *The Red Pyramid*, a historical overlap is mentioned when the Kane siblings speak with Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom:

“You claim not to know me? Of course I’m Thoth. Also called Djehuti. Also called—”

I stifled a laugh. “Ja-hooty?”
Thoth looked offended. “In Ancient Egyptian, it’s a perfectly fine name. The Greeks called me Thoth. Then later they confused me with their god Hermes. Even had the nerve to rename my sacred city Hermopolis, though we’re nothing alike. Believe me, if you’ve ever met Hermes—”

“Agh!” Khufu [the baboon] yelled through a mouthful of Cheerios.

“You’re right,” Thoth agreed. “I’m getting off track.” (p. 288)

Here Thoth mentions the historical privileging of the Greek gods, even within the Egyptian landscape. The city of Khmun was renamed to reflect Greek culture instead of Egyptian and the gods were similarly projected upon.

Riordan seems more willing to explore the separation and mingling of different mythic systems in the Heroes of Olympus series (2010b). The way the traditional Greek gods were altered when they were historically adopted by the Ancient Romans is a tension in the first novel.

**Adding Rome to the mix.**

I would have included the Heroes of Olympus series within the previous comparisons, but, since the series is a companion series to the Percy Jackson quintet and is set after those books and within many of the same settings, the narrative of *The Lost Hero* (2010b), the only novel within that series published during the timeframe of my sample, is brief when explaining the presence of the gods within the world of the story. This is most likely because the reader is expected to have this knowledge from one of Riordan’s other series.

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Jason Grace, a new arrival to Camp Half-Blood in *The Lost Hero*, does not need a lengthy justification when he learns that the gods’ exist. Like Percy, Chiron is the one who discusses the truth of the gods’ existence with him. Despite the fact that Jason woke at the beginning of the story with amnesia, he quickly understands the nature of who Chiron is and of what Camp Half-Blood is:

“You’re Chiron the centaur,” Jason said. “I’m guessing you’re the same one from the old stories, who used to train the Greek heroes like Hercules. This is a camp for demigods, children of the Olympian gods.”

“So you believe those gods still exist?”

“Yes,” Jason said immediately. “I mean, I don’t think we should *worship* them or sacrifice chickens to them or anything, but they’re still around because they’re a powerful part of civilization. They move from country to country as the center of power shifts—like they moved from Ancient Greece to Rome.”

“I *couldn’t* have said it better.” Something about Chiron’s voice had changed.

“So you already know the gods are real. *You have already been claimed, haven’t you?*”

“*Maybe,*” Jason answered. (2010b, p. 90, emphasis present in text)

Although Jason is unable to remember which god of Olympus his father is, he summarizes Chiron’s arguments about the presence of the gods in American culture from the Percy Jackson series, avoiding a repeat introduction to the gods’ presence in the protagonists’ world. What is more, Jason provides insights that, despite being real, the gods are not to be worshipped, paralleling the stance toward the Egyptian gods in the Kane Chronicles. Rather, these re-presentations are not a matter of faith, but the
characters, and by extension the reader, are to acknowledge the role the Greeks and Egyptians have had in shaping the world and in continuing to shape Western culture.

Also, despite his memory loss, Jason seems to naturally refer to the gods by their Roman names instead of by their Greek names, in contrast to the other demigods. Curious about what this means, Jason and Annabeth, Percy’s girlfriend, go to speak with another demigod named Clovis who, being a son of Hypnos, is often asleep. His mother’s cabin at Camp Half-Blood has a soporific effect on the characters. The three attempt to discuss the differences between the Greek and Roman gods while fighting off the urge to sleep:

“But they’re the same gods,” Annabeth said. “Just different names.”

“Not exactly,” Clovis said.

Jason sat forward, now very much awake. “What do you mean, not exactly?”

“Well…” Clovis yawned. “Some gods are only Roman. Like Janus, or Pompona. But even the major Greek gods—it’s not just their names that changed when they moved to Rome. Their appearances changed. Their attributes changed. They even had slightly different personalities.”

“But…” Annabeth faltered. “Okay, so maybe people saw them differently through the centuries. That doesn’t change who they are.”

“Sure it does.” Clovis began to nod off, and Jason snapped his fingers under his nose.

“Coming, Mother!” he yelped. “I mean…Yeah, I’m awake. So, um, personalities. The gods change to reflect their host cultures. You know that, Annabeth. I mean, these days, Zeus likes tailored suits, reality television, and that
Chinese food place on East Twenty-eighth Street, right? It was the same in
Roman times, and the gods were Roman almost as long as they were Greek. It
was a big empire, lasted for centuries. So of course their Roman aspects are still a
big part of their character.” (pp. 104-105)

Based on the way the gods reflect American culture, readers may also draw modern
implications that influence the way they regard the re-presentation of the gods. In the
previous quotation, a reader may draw the implication that since Zeus likes Chinese food
the American versions of the gods are accepting of other cultures’ influences. A reader
could also feel a connection or an opposition to Zeus based on whether she likes or
dislikes Chinese food, reality television, etc.

Throughout the novel, as Jason meets with the various gods, they reveal the
differences among the ancient Greek and Roman understandings of the mythic figures.
For example, Jason and Piper speak with Boreas, the god of the North Wind who resides
in Quebec, Canada. When Boreas realizes that Jason is a Roman demigod, he
transforms:

The god’s form began to flicker. His beard disappeared. He grew taller and
thinner, and his clothes changed into a Roman toga, lined with purple. His head
was crowned with a frosty laurel wreath, and a gladius—a Roman sword like
Jason’s—hung at his side.

“Aquilon,” Jason said, though where he got the god’s Roman name from, he had
no idea.

The god inclined his head. “You recognize me better in this form, yes?” (p. 223)

Boreas’s shift into his Aquilon appearance reflects the traditional Roman perception of
the god, hinting at the gods’ variable re-presentations and significance due to the different ways they are positioned by language, and interpreted by different cultures.

By the end of The Lost Hero, the characters learn that while the Greek demigods, Percy, Annabeth and many others, went on quests and fought Kronos and his allies, there was also a camp of Roman descendants of the gods as well, others like Jason. The elder Greek demigod campers of Camp Half-Blood, Chiron and Jason discuss the existence of the Roman camp and why the Greek and Roman demigods have been kept separate:

“Romans…You expect us to believe there’s another camp with demigods, but they follow the Roman forms of the gods. And we’ve never even heard of them.” Piper sat forward. “The gods have kept the two groups apart, because every time they see each other, they try to kill each other.”

“I can respect that,” Clarisse [a daughter of Ares] said. “Still, why haven’t we ever run across each other on quests?”

“Oh, yes,” Chiron said sadly. “You have, many times. It’s always a tragedy, and always the gods do their best to wipe clean the memories of those involved. The rivalry goes all the way back to the Trojan War, Clarisse. The Greeks invaded Troy and burned it to the ground. The Trojan hero Aeneas escaped, and eventually made his way to Italy, where he founded the race that would someday become Rome. The Romans grew more and more powerful, worshipping the same gods but under different names, and with slightly different personalities.”


…Annabeth twirled her knife on the table. “And the Romans hated the Greeks.
They took revenge when they conquered the Greek isles, and made them part of the Roman Empire.”

“Not exactly *hated* them,” Jason said. “The Romans admired Greek culture, and were a little jealous. In return, the Greeks thought the Romans were barbarians, but they respected their military power. So during Roman times, demigods started to divide—either Greek or Roman.”

“And it’s been that way ever since,” Annabeth guessed. “But this is crazy. Chiron, where were the Romans during the Titan War [the war fought during the Percy Jackson series]? Didn’t they want to help?”

Chiron tugged at his beard. “They did help, Annabeth. While you and Percy were leading the battle to save Manhattan, who do you think conquered Mount Othrys, the Titans’ base in California?” (2010b, pp. 549-550, emphasis present in text)

This historic conflict between the Greek and Roman understandings of the gods among their demigods has influenced the world within the series, supposedly mirroring the American Civil War (p. 535). Jason’s arrival at Camp Half-Blood sets up a potential new union between the Greek and Roman demigods, sending a more allegorical message that people with long-standing conflicts or different worldviews need to unite and set aside their past differences, just as the heroes in the story must. A reader may interpret this allegory in many ways: As racial discrimination, as tensions between political parties, as long standing conflicts between nations or high school cliques, etc., all conflicts that people could resolve.

Although in the Percy Jackson series and the Kane Chronicles, the gods of 280
different cultures are separated and although the Heroes of Olympus series acknowledges continuing tensions, with this third series, Riordan begins to push toward a more complex view of the world within his three series, one in which the gods of different mythic systems co-exist, mingle and perhaps even unite. Riordan has taken his first step toward doing this in the Heroes of Olympus series, not only in examining the different perceptions of Greek and Roman gods, but also by exploring Native American beliefs. Another author, Scott Mebus, runs ahead and focuses on the conflicts between two cultures of gods and their implications for the mortal world in his Gods of Manhattan trilogy.

**Gods of the Colonists and Gods of the Native Americans**

Riordan’s Heroes of Olympus series characters note parallels between the ancient Greek myths and a belief system that is still practiced in modern times; that of the Cherokee Native Americans. *The Lost Hero* (2010b) expands on the world presented in Riordan’s Percy Jackson series in various ways and introduces new heroes, including Latino and Native American protagonists. Piper, whose father is a member of a Cherokee tribe, recalls a summer night spent at her deceased grandfather’s cabin in Tahlequah, Oklahoma with her father. They had decided to sleep outside in sleeping bags. While outside, they observe the constellations:

Piper pointed out the constellations she’d been reading about—Hercules, Apollo’s lyre, Sagittarius the centaur.

…“Your grandpa would say those Greek patterns are a bunch of bull. He told me
the stars were creatures with glowing fur, like magic hedgehogs. Once, long ago, some hunters even captured a few in the forest. They didn’t know what they’d done until nighttime, when the star creatures began to glow. Golden sparks flew from their fur, so the Cherokee released them back into the sky.”

“You believe in magic hedgehogs?” Piper asked.

Her dad laughed. “I think Grandpa Tom was full of bull, too, just like the Greeks. But it’s a big sky. I suppose there’s room for Hercules and hedgehogs.” (p. 232)

Here two belief systems are contemplated and the characters decide that both may possibly explain the constellations or stars. Piper continues to contemplate the stars after she learns that her mother is Aphrodite, one of the Greek goddesses, and draws her own conclusion about what the stars are:

She looked at the stars, trying to imagine them as glowing hedgehogs. All she saw were the stick figures she knew—Hercules running across the sky, on his way to kill monsters. Dad was probably right. The Greeks and the Cherokee were equally crazy. The stars were just balls of fire. (p. 233)

Uncertain about what to believe, Piper relies on the scientific explanation for the stars. Nonetheless, different belief systems mingle together, potentially explaining aspects of the world.

The Gods of Manhattan trilogy by Scott Mebus (2008, 2009, 2010) is far more explicit in the way it explores the tension between Native American beliefs and those of the gods of Manhattan, who are all historic figures who have lived on in peoples’ memories. To introduce this tension, Hex the sorcerer, explains to Rory and his sister Bridget that the gods are relatively young:
“See, these gods, they’re newcomers in the grand scheme of things. They’ve only been here as long as the colonists who birthed them, four hundred years at most. For a thousand years before that, Mannahatta belonged to a different people.” (2008, p. 69)

This presents the idea that mortals—people—create the gods. The story also presents a mythology that is specific to America and to Manhattan. The tension between the gods of the colonists and the Munsee Native American spirits, may also seem familiar: The fears and conflicts between Native Americans and settlers over land and power.

Part of the premise of Mebus’s series is that in the nineteenth-century almost all of the spirits of the Munsee Indians were trapped in Central Park. This segregation has caused an imbalance on Manhattan. Hex continues to explain to Rory and Bridget:

“Their mortals were gone, but in the spirit world, in Mannahatta, the Munsee gods remained. Keep in mind, it had been their realm long before the European colonists had shown up; they had named it Mannahatta, in fact. Their connection with the island, with the land, was so strong that it remembered them long after their people had left. Unfortunately their relationship with the colonists’ immortal gods was no better than the one their mortal counterparts had had with the colonists: neither trusted the other. Small skirmishes began to break out between the two peoples, gradually spreading throughout Mannahatta as they fought over control of the spirit world. These fights would affect the mortal world time and time again, the worst of them causing the Draft Riots during the Civil War that almost burned the city to the ground.” (pp. 75-76, emphasis present in text)

The survival of a culture’s gods is connected to memory, but this time to the memory of
the land instead of that of living people, a different source of magic. And as with other
series, the conflicts among the gods influence the mortal world (and vice versa). In this
particular case, the gods restricted the Munsee spirits’ movements to Central Park,
limiting their power and connection to the land, potentially a harsh allusion to the
historical relocation of Native Americans to reservations.

Hex hypothesizes that this maltreatment of the Munsee spirits has upset the
balance between the mythic and mortal world:

“I’ve come to believe that removing the Munsees has thrown the balance between
our worlds completely out of whack. For the past hundred and thirty years it’s
been getting worse and worse. Haven’t you noticed the weather changing? The
long summers and short winters? The temperature shifting drastically from day to
day? Worse, the people are getting restless. Many feel dissatisfied and lost
without knowing why. This had led to riots and disorder in the past; it will again,
and soon. I believe this will only get worse while the Munsees are imprisoned
and the needs of the land are ignored.” (p. 77)

This presents a cultural and relational reasoning for people’s emotional states and of the
shifts in weather. As the mythic realm of Mannahatta and the island of Manhattan are
plagued in the book series, similarly injustices and prejudices over race still tarnish the
American cultural conscience.

In the first two novels in Mebus’s series, *Gods of Manhattan* (2008) and *Sprits in the Park* (2009), as the Native American spirits grow frustrated and angry at being
trapped, the colonist spirits of the island still fear them. Willem Kieft, a European, who
as a mortal had been exiled to New Amsterdam (which would later be named New York)
from Denmark (2008, p. 72), and many other antagonistic power-hungry gods and spirits spread propaganda about the Munsees. Kieft encourages the European spirits to fear those who are different by spreading false rumors and having gangsters dress as Native American spirits to terrorize the city (2009, p. 227).

The gods who wish to free the Munsee Indians respond by writing a song about a tragic marriage between a European daughter of the Mayor god, Alexander Hamilton, named Abigail, and a Munsee spirit named Buck. The god of tall tales, Washington Irving, argues for why they must make a song out of Abigail and Buck’s experience to counter the propaganda Kieft’s supporters are spreading:

“…The people of Mannahatta are afraid. They’re only being fed one story: the tale of Munsee terror. We need to tear away the frightening mask of the other and show them what lies behind: a beating heart, just like their own.” (2009, p. 124)

Incorporating issues of miscommunication, the danger of only hearing only a single story about a group or culture, fear, prejudice, status, ownership and power, the Gods of Manhattan series provides a complicated view of the lasting tensions over the treatment of Native Americans and their relationship with colonists or immigrants since before the United States’ founding as a nation.

At the end of the series, the Munsees have been freed, war between the European gods and Munsee spirits has been avoided. Kieft’s lies have been exposed and his army defeated by the cooperation of both European gods, their immortal children, Munsee spirits and other creatures of the city. The citizens of Mannahatta establish a tentative union:

A bonfire burned merrily in the middle of the Munsee village as the victorious
army celebrated the survival of their beloved city. Munsees and gods sang
together while battle roaches and children of the gods swapped tales of their valor
in battle. Kieft’s army had melted away, disappearing back into Mannahatta, and
while some advocated searching them out to punish them, the Council of Twelve
[the mayor and governing European gods] declared that there was to be no
retribution. They would begin this new era of friendship with the Munsees with a
general amnesty so that their joined future could begin with peace. (2010, p.
366).

Despite past differences, wars and injustices, the mythic figures of Mannahatta choose
forgiveness and communion as the best course forward to establish a commitment to
peace. Since what occurs in the mythic world is mirrored by the real world, the union
among the gods of various cultures should encourage acceptance among the characters of
various cultures and perhaps even among the readers.

**Other Mingling Mythic Figures**

Looking beyond the bounds of the United States, in Sarwat Chadda’s Devil Kiss
series (2009, 2010) 15-year-old Billi and the remaining group of men who comprise the
historical Christian organization, the Knights Templar, battle the forces of evil on Earth
and serve the Christian God. Billi tells a nine-year-old girl, Vasilisa, who may join the
organization in the second novel in the series, *Dark Goddess*, (2010), about the Knights.
Vasilisa, who is Russian, notes parallels between the Knights Templar and a similar
Russian group, the Bogatyrs, which is included later in the story:
“You know about the Bogatyrs?” asked Billi.

Vasilisa’s eyes brightened. “Everybody in Russia knows! My mother used to read me stories about them. They fought dragons, evil witches, the Mongols, the Muslims. All the evil people.”

Billi laughed. “My mother was a Muslim.”

Vasilisa went red. “Are you?”

Billi shrugged. She could pray in Latin, Greek, English, and Arabic. She knew the direction of Mecca and the psalms. Did God really care?” (p. 59)

Billi’s internal question of “Did God really care?” is not her questioning whether God cares about people’s worship in general, but rather establishes a union among the Islamic, Jewish and Christian traditions, their connected origins and that these faiths are all ways to know the same deity. Billi herself represents an integrated and global stance of the ways different cultures and perspectives may mingle. The series acknowledge a possible mingling among the different ways to worship and to understand God. While, within Dark Goddess, the “man-eating ogress” and figure of Russian legend, Baba Yaga (Warner, 2002, p. 27), is believed by some characters to be a goddess, her origin is also described as being a human “witch” with such powers that she was historically worshipped as a god (p. 36). The Islamic Judeo-Christian God is privileged as real, but nonetheless never appears as a character. This presents a common theme of incorporating discussion of contemporary faiths, but not including their mythic figures.

Turning to other mythic systems, Karen Healey’s Guardian of the Dead (2010) is set on the South Island of New Zealand in the city of Christchurch and the novel represents the mythic figures of the indigenous Māori population in both a modern setting
and in a mythic realm and underworld (discussed previously in Chapter Three). The protagonist of the young adult novel is Ellie Spencer. She listens to the news about a strange serial killer who is making his or her way across New Zealand, killing people and stealing the victims’ eyes. Her best friend, Kevin, a fellow student at the Mansfield College boarding school, is of Māori descent and informs her that eyes are sacred in Māori belief, as they discuss one of the recent murders:

“…Hey, did you hear there’s been another Eyeslasher murder?”


“Me too. Murder’s bad enough, but taking their eyes is sick.”

“I think the murder probably matters more.”

“Sure, but eyes are tapu, Ellie.”

I blinked at him. Kevin’s parents, on the two occasions I’d met them for uncomfortable dinners, had been as stiffly Anglo-Saxon as posh New Zealanders came, but Kevin’s light brown skin wasn’t the result of a good tan. I knew that his great-grandmother had been Ngāi Tahu [a member of the predominant South Island Iwi or tribe], and that he was one of the leading lights of Mansfield’s kappa haka performance group, but I hadn’t realized his desire to learn more about his roots had meant this much investment in Māori beliefs about the sacred. (pp. 12-13)

Although Māori culture and beliefs are central in the novel, characters who are Christian, Bible stories and Ancient Greek myth references are also blended into the narrative (some of these references are used as examples in Chapters One and Three). Ellie
discusses her personal beliefs with another student from her Classics class and her crush, Mark Nolan, after she reveals her mother’s recent struggle with cancer and how Ellie, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, found solace by helping to teach self-defense classes and by talking with her instructor, Master Rosenberg-Katz:

“My dad started going back to church, and he wanted me to come with him, but I couldn’t do that. I didn’t have any faith in it.”

“So you’re an atheist?”

This was a much better direction for the conversation. “I’m agnostic, I guess. I’d believe if I had proof.”

“Some people find faith comforting,” he said.

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. “I know. It must be nice for them.”

“You don’t believe in anything out of the ordinary? Ghosts?”

I began to shake my head, then hesitated. “Well, I’ve never seen any. My grandmother said she saw ghosts all the time when she was a girl, but then she got married and had my dad, and they stopped showing themselves to her. But she believed in God too, so, I don’t know.”

“What would you do?” he asked. “If you found out the Greek gods or fauns or harpies or dryads were real?”

I laughed. “Stay the hell out of their way, jeez. You know the stories. Nothing good ever happens to humans who get mixed up in that stuff.”

“That’s sensible,” he noted, the corner of his mouth twisting. “Anyway, sorry, go on. I didn’t mean to start an interrogation.”

I hesitated, but he nodded encouragingly. “Well, actually, it’s kind of related.
Master Rosenberg-Katz—she’s amazing, she’s a fourth dan [black belt in Tai Kwon Do]—could see that I wasn’t doing well, so she invited me to assist with teaching, and she’d talk to me after classes about eum-yang.”

“Yin-yang?”

“That’s the Chinese; this is Korean. Same concept. It’s all about finding balance, physically and mentally. It really helped, last year.” I shrugged, trying not to feel embarrassed at spilling my guts so very thoroughly. “So I guess I have faith in that; in trying to be balanced, even though I’m not very good at it. And trying to pass it on.” (pp. 87-89, emphasis present in text)

This complicated view of overlapping belief systems, uncertainty of faith and blending of cultures presents the reader the relatable experience of questioning and searching for a faith or a paradigm that best suits the individual. *Guardian of the Dead* shows characters who encounter many ancient and present-day belief systems and choose which they will internalize and use to make meaning of their experiences.

When Ellie later enters the mists and the Māori mythic realm, she encounters fairies, or patupaiarehe, and the Māori goddess Hine-nui-te-pō. When she prepares to leave the underworld, she hopes to lead Mark, who had died in a battle, out with her. As the two say goodbye, she realizes there may be a way to save him:

Something was nagging at me under the grief; something someone had told me about stories. I chased the memory until I held it firmly, a new but growing hope.

In my mead-happy daze Professor Gribaldi had said that the stories in your head changed the world. Mark had said that too, or something like it, sitting on the banks of the Avon. And he was really here.

Mark was still holding my bruised shoulders. “Can you forgive me?”

I gently disengaged from his grip. “Not yet.”

He flinched.

“We’ll talk about it later,” I said, and turned around, clenching my eyes shut.

His voice was startled. “Ellie?”

“Don’t talk to me,” I ordered. “Don’t touch me. Don’t make a sound. Just follow.”

I thought turning my back on him had been difficult, but the first step was harder still. (p. 312, emphasis present in text)

Knowing that she has internalized different myths from different cultures, Ellie draws upon the Greek myth of Orpheus trying to lead his wife back to the land of the living (Hamilton, 1969, p. 141) to save Mark. She gains power from and defines herself and her world using many different stories. Although not faced with having to lead others out of an underworld, the reader may relate to Ellie’s initial uncertainty over which paradigms shape her understanding or to the sense of mingling mythic systems that influence an understanding of the world, reality, experience and the self.

Novels like Guardian of the Dead (Healey, 2010), Esther Friesner’s Tempting Fate (2006) and Wendy Delsol’s Stork (2010)—which while not an official part of my sample, I examine further in the Conclusion—present a movement toward complex and mingling views of myth and other paradigms and show people from different backgrounds and systems of belief intermingling and searching to understand and be understood (Table 16).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Series/Novel Title (Year)</th>
<th>Mythic Systems Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bray, Libba</td>
<td><em>Going Bovine</em> (2009)</td>
<td>Norse, Judeo-Christian, Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friesner, Esther</td>
<td><em>Temping Fate</em> (2006)</td>
<td>Greek, Norse, Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riordan, Rick</td>
<td>Heroes of Olympus series: <em>The Lost Hero</em> (2010b)</td>
<td>American, Greek, Roman, Cherokee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Authors</strong></td>
<td><strong>9 Young Adult and Children’s novels</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 Mingling Mythic Systems</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Mythic systems re-presented in the young adult and middle grade children’s novels: Differentiated by those that mingle mythic systems and by those that only re-present one mythic system
### Table 16 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Series/Novel Title (Year)</th>
<th>Mythic System Re-presented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deming, Sarah</td>
<td><em>Iris, Messenger</em> (2007)</td>
<td>Roman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kane Chronicles: <em>The Red Pyramid</em>, (2010a)</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmer, Janni Lee</td>
<td><em>Thief Eyes</em> (2010)</td>
<td>Norse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**14 Authors**  
**28 Young Adult and Children’s novels**  
**7 Separate Mythic Systems**

It is important to note that some of the novels listed as not mingling mythic systems in
Table 16 do include discussion of other faiths, but they do not include mythic figures from those other faiths, meaning the various mythic systems are not treated equally or as possessing the same realm.

Writing about a present-day new potential myth of Earth-centered interconnection, Leeming (2002) asserts:

To the extent that this new realization—this emerging narrative of interconnectedness as opposed to dominance and exclusivity—takes hold, people will necessarily look at politics, nationalism, gender roles, economics, race, moral values, art, education, religion—at everything—in a new way. In light of this new myth, the old religious systems that once stressed the importance of revelation for their own communities may well take on a more planetary, ecological, nurturing, more feminine dimension. (pp. 24-25)

While the specifics of Leeming’s new myth may vary from the ones presented within this study, all speak to a paradigm shift that incorporates a more global and interconnected view and positioning.

In this chapter, I have noted that when young adult and children’s authors decide to re-present the gods of an ancient culture or even historic deceased Americans in a present-day realistic setting, the general preference has been to only incorporate the gods of one mythic system, ancient religion or structure of belief. Aside from the few exceptions mentioned in this chapter, whether conflicts with or parallels to Native American beliefs, the gods of different cultures are almost always kept separate within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels. The mythic figures of different mythic systems rarely interact or even appear in the same novel or book series.
together. Perhaps this is because a children’s author only feels comfortable or familiar with one mythic system or because accommodating more beliefs may seem too complicated. This segregation of beliefs does not reflect the reality of people from different cultures and beliefs having to interact on a daily basis within the technology-driven, diverse, global reality many readers encounter. People who lend their faith to different mythic systems must interact and try to understand one another in the global and integrated realities of the present-day world. Does it not make sense that to help guide young readers to understand others by reading about mythic figures from different cultures overcoming their differences, respectfully discussing them openly or interacting amicably? I anticipate that more overlap among the paradigms and mythic systems is a direction this publishing trend of including mythic figures will take in the future. This would be a direction I would welcome young adult and middle grade children’s novels explore more widely and in more depth. By providing a young reader with the language and with models of how to respectfully engage, discuss or see multiple views of the world, she is positioned to better interact with people who embody different stances on reality and perspectives of the world.
Chapter Seven: When mortals and gods meet

Cronus Chronicles trilogy       Oh.My.Gods. duology
Gods of Manhattan trilogy      Percy Jackson series
*Iris, Messenger*              *Temping Fate*
Need series                   Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy

“Wouldn’t you do anything to save your family, even if it upset the balance of the cosmos?”

~The Egyptian god Thoth
*The Red Pyramid*, 2010a, p. 292

“It is not like the gods to care for mortals”

~Billi
*Sarwat Chadda, Dark Goddess*, 2010, p. 199

“It is not for us to decide which gods survive; that is only for mortals”

~Walt Whitman, the god of Optimism
*Scott Mebus, Gods of Manhattan*, 2008, p. 50

By having the gods of myth exist in a realistic present-day setting, the young adult and middle grade children’s novels that incorporate such characters within my sample almost always give the human protagonists a personal relationship with the mythic figures; a personal relationship with a god or monster. In many cases the gods are
parents or ancestors to the mortal human protagonists. The presence of gods in a present-day realistic setting also opens ways for readers to see characters dialoguing with mythic figures about central questions of the nature of existence. Instead of unanswered prayers, the gods speak back to the characters directly. While some gods are still described as scary, antagonistic or unapproachable, others offer empowerment for the young protagonists. Having relatable young characters interact with mythic figures provides an accessible way for young readers to engage with the concerns and realms of myth and may contribute to their forming a sense of identity and understanding of the world as they reflect upon the choices of the characters and contrast their behaviors to the readers’ own.

**Feel Empowered: The descendant of a god**

When discussing some of the characteristics of traditional Greek myth, Bruche Louden notes that a hero’s “personal relationship with the gods” is central to heroic Greek myth (2006, p 167). The same seems to be true for the re-presentations of mythic figures in early twenty-first century young adult and middle grade children’s novels. In the case of both traditional myth and in recent children’s novels, characters cannot get more personal than being the child of a god.

*The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005) is the first novel in the larger series featuring Percy Jackson, the son of a mortal modern-day woman, Sally, and a Greek god, Poseidon. Percy learns of his special status as the son of a god while at a camp for the children of the Greek gods. But before that, Percy struggles with his failings in school and is worried what his father, whom he had been told was “lost at sea” (p. 30), would
think of him. He and his mother talk about his dad:

“I wish he could see you, Percy. He would be so proud.”

I wondered how she could say that. What was so great about me? A dyslexic, hyperactive boy with a D+ report card, kicked out of school for the sixth time in six years.” (p. 38)

Percy feels frustrated and as though many of his problems are beyond his control. Issues of powerlessness abound not only in this sample of children’s novels, but in young adult and children’s literature in general. Gerard Jones notes that feeling powerless is a common part of childhood:

Of all the challenges children face, one of the biggest is their own powerlessness. Some children face especially painful challenges: the loss of a parent, abuse, neglect, hostile schoolmates, illness, poverty, neighborhood violence. But even the best protected children, with the most supportive parents, have to wrestle every day with reminders of how small and powerless they still are. (2002, p. 65)

Percy, as well as other protagonists, learns that their struggles with mythic tensions or mythic figures can become a source of strength. After travelling to the Greek underworld and stopping a coup against the god Hades, Charlotte in the Cronus Chronicles trilogy (2006, 2007, 2009) faces a bully named Chris Shapiro. The narration states, “she used to be bothered by Chris, but once you’ve faced the King of the Dead, the school bully isn’t quite so scary anymore” (2008, p. 30) her experiences in the mythic realm empower Charlotte to handle her more ordinary conflicts with confidence.

In The Lightning Thief (Riordan, 2005), another camper and eventual friend, Annabeth, reveals to Percy that he is a half-blood, a son of a Greek god, also called a
demigod, and informs him of all the powers associated with his status:

“You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t one of us.”

“You don’t know anything about me.”

“No?” She raised an eyebrow. “I bet you moved around from school to school. I bet you were kicked out of a lot of them.”

“How—”

“Diagnosed with dyslexia. Probably ADHD, too.”

I tried to swallow my embarrassment. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Taken together, it’s almost a sure sign. The letters float off the page when you read, right? That’s because your mind is hardwired for ancient Greek. And the ADHD—you’re impulsive, can’t sit still in the classroom. That’s your battlefield reflexes. In a real fight, they’d keep you alive. As for the attention problems, that’s because you see too much, Percy, not too little. Your senses are better than a regular mortal’s. Of course the teachers want you medicated. Most of them are monsters. They don’t want you seeing them for what they are.” (pp. 87-88)

Although Percy has special status and is not a “mere mortal,” he is still a relatable empowered young character. His weaknesses as a character are common concerns to children that within Riordan’s constructed world, become strengths, an optimistic and empowering voice for myth. Riordan did this intentionally. As a teacher who taught children with dyslexia and ADHD, he also has a son diagnosed with ADHD. Riordan writes he sought to find a way to help his son understand his diagnosis. He describes:

How could I help [my son] make sense of what was going on with him? How
could I frame the problem in a positive way?

In the end, I fell back on what I knew best—storytelling.

My son’s saving grace in second grade was Greek mythology. This was the only part of the curriculum he enjoyed. Every night, he would ask me to tell him bedtime stories from the myths, and when I ran out of them, he asked me to make up a new one.

And so it sprang from my mind unbidden—like Athena from Zeus’ forehead—the myth of how ADHD and dyslexia came to be. I created Percy Jackson, a Greek demigod in the tradition of Hercules and Theseus and Perseus, except Percy is a modern kid. He has ADHD and dyslexia, and he learns that taken together, those two conditions indicate without a doubt that he has Olympian blood.

In *The Lighting Thief*, ADHD means you have finely tuned senses. You see too much, not too little. These reflexes don’t serve you well in a boring classroom, but they would keep you alive on the battlefield. Dyslexia indicates that your brain is hard-wired for Ancient Greek, so of course reading English is a struggle. My son had no trouble buying this theory at all.

In the story, Percy Jackson discovers that being different can be a source of strength—and a mark of greatness. Being academically hopeless does not mean you are a hopeless person. Percy was my way of honoring all the children I’ve taught who have ADHD and dyslexia, but more importantly he was a myth for my son to make sense of who he is. (Riordan, 2008b, pp. vii-viii)

Riordan intentionally created a new myth incorporating dimensions of traditional myth to lend power to it and to connect it to a larger dialogue of heroism so he could help his son
make meaning of his situation and help him remember his value as a student and individual, despite his troubles in the classroom. Riordan created a myth that empowers Percy and readers like him. Added to this, after Percy learns that his difficulties with reading and maintaining focus on one thing are actually strengths, he discovers that his father is not lost at sea as his mother led him to believe. Instead, he is the god, Poseidon, charged with overseeing his watery realms. Throughout the series, Percy gets to know his father. At first, they both seem weary of each other. Percy narrates:

At night, I lay awake and listened to the sea, knowing my father was out there.

Maybe he wasn’t quite sure about me yet, maybe he hadn’t even wanted me born, but he was watching. And so far, he was proud of what I’d done. (2005, p. 355)

Such a reaction may be relatable to readers who have been reintroduced to an absentee parent or who feels uncertain about someone’s love for them.

Later in the series, Percy’s allegiance to the gods of Olympus and to his father in the war between them and the Titans is called into question because of his familial ties to the gods. In *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008a), Percy is shocked to learn that Calypso, his new friend and the daughter of Atlas, a god who supported the Titans in the first Titan War presented in traditional Greek origin myths (Hamilton, 1969, pp. 81-82), had been exiled for helping Atlas and the Titans. She explains to him that the island where she lives is her prison:

“The gods [of Olympus] do not trust their enemies. And rightly so. I should not complain. Some of the prisons are not nearly as nice as mine.”

“But that’s not fair,” I said. “Just because you’re related doesn’t mean you support him [Atlas].

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“But, Percy,” Calypso said gently, “I did support him in the first war. He is my father.”

“What? But the Titans are evil!”

“Are they? All of them? All the time?” She pursed her lips. “Tell me, Percy. I have no wish to argue with you. But do you support the gods because they are good, or because they are your family?”

I didn’t answer. She had a point. Last winter, after Annabeth and I had saved Olympus, the gods had had a debate about whether or not they should kill me. That hadn’t been exactly good. But still, I felt like I supported them because Poseidon was my dad. (2008a, p. 217)

Throughout the series, Percy tries to achieve a sense of family with his father and with his fellow campers. He slowly realizes what he and others will do for family and to see that their divine parent is respected and has power among the other gods. (This theme is explored in Chapter Five.)

Not only do the protagonists in my sample fight for the mythic figures in their families, but they are often empowered through their struggles. At the end of Tera Lynn Childs’s *Oh.My.Gods.* (2008), Phoebe learns that her great-grandmother is Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. Her descendent status is discovered as she runs an important cross-country race. When she rushes toward the finish line, Phoebe glows with effort as her dormant powers emerge. Her ordinary human friends are not surprised by her new status. One, Cesca, observes, “We’ve always known you were a goddess. This just makes it legit” (p. 254).

In the sequel, *Goddess Boot Camp* (2009), teenage Phoebe must learn how to
control her powers in a two-week program she attends with other descendents, all the others of whom are ten-year-olds, to teenaged Phoebe’s embarrassment. One of the trust exercises she must perform involves falling backward to be caught by her partner, a councilor named Xander. Phoebe is surprised to learn from her step-sister, Stella, a councilor at the camp, that the exercise is actually about trusting in her own power:

“Think about trusting yourself not to fall.”

“What?” That doesn’t even make sense.

“Just try it.”


I fall back.

She catches me yards before I hit the ground.

I hear clapping.

When I open my eyes, I see Stella and Xander on either side of me, standing over me.

“Congratulations,” Stella says, beaming. “You just earned your first merit badge.”

I stare at her clapping hands. “You’re not holding me,” I say stupidly.

She shakes her head.

“Then who—”

I twist my head back. No one is there.

“You are,” Stella says triumphantly. (p. 103, emphasis present in text)

In this scene and others within the *Oh.My.Gods.* and *Goddess Boot Camp* duology, individual empowerment is the focus. Phoebe feels confidence and power through her
familial connection to the Greek goddess Nike. The opening of *Goddess Boot Camp* begins:

I.

Am.

A.

Goddess.

An honest-to-goodness goddess.

With superpowers and everything.

Okay, so I’m just a minor, minor, minor goddess. Technically, I’m supposed to say *hematheos*, which means godly blood, or part god, but goddess sounds much more impressive (to the like ten people I’m allowed to tell). (p.3, emphasis present in text)

As she narrates, Phoebe claims the status and position of goddess, knowing that it sounds impressive and powerful.

In contrast to Phoebe, Morgan from Maryrose Wood’s *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* trilogy (2007, 2008, 2009), does not share this sense of empowerment. She has trouble reconciling the fact that she is part goddess and has trouble describing her summer trip to Ireland, where she learned that she was Morganne, a fairy princess (2007). In the sequel, *How I Found the Perfect Dress* (2008), she wonders, “Was this a good time to tell the junior prom planning committee that I was part goddess?” (p. 12) and she thinks about how she has changed and how she cannot tell her friend Sarah most of what she has experienced:

But that was before the summer. Before Ireland. Before the old Morgan
discovered she was really Morganne, the fearless, flowy-dress-wearing, part-goddess legend who had the power to undo enchantments, talk to horses, swim with mermaids and rescue stolen children from the clutches of mischievous faeries.

Obviously I hadn’t told Sarah everything about my summer in Ireland. I kept it simple and magic-free. (2008, p. 15)

At the end of the trilogy, after she has prevented the veil between the mythic and real realms from being removed to blend the worlds together (2009), Morgan actually volunteers to forget all of her half-goddess magical adventures and live as an ordinary human with her boyfriend, Colin.

Then he [Colin] turned to me, his eyes full of concern. “But, darlin’—ye want to forget all yer magic adventures? Are ye sure?”

…“Colin, you and me living on opposite sides of the ocean is nothing compared to us living in opposite versions of reality. That’s a kind of long-distance relationship nobody could make work.” I reached out and let my fingers touch the side of his face. “Besides, I’ve had plenty of faery-world adventures. Now I’m ready for some human ones. With you.” (p. 264)

While her desire to live happily with Colin motivates her choice, a unicorn, Epona, asserts that magic still exists:

“Even with the veil, humans never wholly forget the magic realm. The truth of our world will still be known to you, in the way it has always been known: in stories and dreams, in art and the imagination and in the wonder of childhood.” She whinnied, full of feeling. “There are many kinds of magic, after all.” (pp.
Morgan’s denial of her goddess-ness is complicated by the fact that after she experiences her memory loss, Morgan decides to officially change her name to Morganne, a name while being the feminine form of her current name, is also how she was addressed by the fairy creatures and in the fairy realm throughout the trilogy. A bit of her goddess nature does live on in the human realm.

Similarly, Iris in Sarah Deming’s Iris, Messenger (2007), longs to be special. It is through her relationships and discussions with the Greek gods and the use of a magical rainbow shawl that transports her from place to place along the East Coast, that she learns who she is and that she is a heroine. But initially she thinks:

There are dozens of kids at her school who were more likely heroines. They got better grades, or were cute or rich or good at sports, or winners of violin prizes or spelling bees.

Iris was none of these things.

But secretly she did feel special. She always had. She was just special in a way that school couldn’t measure, but maybe Athena could. (p. 160, emphasis present in text)

The educational system is critiqued for not being able to measure Iris’s true worth as a character. So, Iris asks the Greek goddesses Athena and Artemis if she is also a goddess, but Athena answers no:

Iris hung her head, ashamed that she had even thought it. “I’m not a goddess then?” she whispered, unable to control the tears running down her face. “I’m not immortal?” She had so hoped. She had hoped that Athena had chosen her to be
the new messenger goddess.

“No.” Athena smiled bitterly. “Do you really want that, little one, after what you have seen of us?”

Artemis said, “You think you want it but you do not. Look at us, Iris, lingering past the time when our powers were full. We wane and wane. Now we are like the moon in its tiniest sliver.” (p. 164).

The Greek gods in *Iris, Messenger*, have grown weak over time. They imply that becoming a goddess would not be of value to Iris, that as a human she can be special.

Soon after, when Iris is faced with the choice of taking on the position of her namesake, the goddess Iris who was a servant to Hera and a messenger among the gods, the idea is momentarily tempting for her. Since, “all she had ever wanted her whole life was to feel special, and to have wonderful adventures. [But] Both of those things had already happened” (p. 195) in the course of her story. Iris instead chooses to live as a human:

It wasn’t such a hard decision, really. Without the rainbow, she would just be plain old Iris. But that wasn’t such a bad thing to be…

She handed the shawl back to Hera, who shook with rage.

“You will be sorry.”

“Probably,” Iris said, “but I’ll get over it.” (p. 197)

More sure of who she is as an individual, Iris chooses to be normal, but also still special. Although many of the young protagonists struggle with the status of being associated with mythic figures, they all find individualized ways to feel empowered and to know their self-worth in worlds that otherwise often position young characters as powerless,
whether that sense of strength comes through association with a mythic figure or not.

**And the Rest of Us?**

While characters who discover they are related to gods often develop personal relationships with them, mortal characters with no such familial connection have more varied or difficult relationships with mythic figures. It would seem that the gods are less respectful of ordinary mortal characters within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels.

For example, in Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), if a god were to assume his true form, the power would be “so great that any mortal looking on him will disintegrate” (2009 p. 43). Similarly in Scott Mebus’s Gods of Manhattan trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010), when Rory is in the presence of multiple gods, his friend Alexa, an immortal daughter of one of the gods must comfort him as the gods’ powers influence his emotions:

[Rory] felt optimistic and sad and invincible and righteous and nostalgic and clever, all at the same time. He wanted to invest some money and rescue a kitten and play point guard for the Knicks. The feelings overwhelmed him, and he fell back heavily against the door to the jewelry store. Alexa gave him a pitying look. “Those are gods you’re seeing out there in the rain,” she said. “You know how it feels to be in the presence of one of them, right? Now imagine hundreds of them, all in the same place. If you were out there in the middle of them, you’d be a bloody mess, believe me. Mortals weren’t meant to be around that much divinity.
Ordinary humans cannot handle the true power of the gods in this re-presentation. Yet, many of the young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample position the gods as relying upon mortals remembering them to stay alive. Staying with the Gods of Manhattan series as an example, in a dream, Rory, a thirteen-year-old mortal with the power to see the truth, argues with Willem Kieft, a supposed god who wishes to take over all of Mannahatta and make it his own. Kieft states:

“This is my city. Most of its wonders stem from me. Avoiding my touch here is as futile as trying to swim without getting wet. I am everywhere, everything.”

“Then why are you bothering with me?” Rory asked.

“Even gods enjoy having their work appreciated,” the man said. He waved out at the city. “Is it not grand?”

“You didn’t create any of this,” Rory shot back. “It’s not yours. It’s ours. We created you! You answer to us!” (2010, p. 37, emphasis present in text)

They argue about the relationship mortals are meant to have to gods. Within the world of the Gods of Manhattan trilogy, within this new myth, the memories of mortals and of the land determine who is to be a god. The gods need mortals to continue to exist. They need to serve their purposes for the mortals to maintain their status as gods. This challenges many ideas that gods exist outside the human realm and beyond people’s need for them.

In other cases, the gods’ powers are unchallenged and ordinary humans are actually discriminated against by the gods and their descendants, creating status hierarchies. Returning to Childs’s Oh.My.Gods. (2008), when Phoebe, still believing she
is an ordinary mortal, first arrives on the island Serfopoula, near Greece, to attend a school intended for the descendants of the Greek gods who have magical powers, she is discriminated against by some of her classmates. They call her *kako*. Phoebe needs another student, Nicole, to explain the word’s significance and the strict social hierarchy among the students:

“How does *kako* mean, anyway?” I ask, remembering how Stella [my new step-sister] had called me that when we met. “It’s not good is it?”

Nicole shrugs. “It’s a tactless way of saying you’re not a descendant. *Nothos* is politically correct.”

I have a feeling that when she says “tactless” she really means “insulting.”

“First of all,” she says, moving on, “cliques at the Academy are a little different. There’s almost no way to break in—not that you should want to—because they’re pretty much determined by your association.”

Association? I don’t understand what she means and decide not to say anything, hoping I’ll figure it out, but she must sense how clueless I am.

“You family.” She gives me a pointed look.

Still not clear, I look around.

…”Look at that group.” Nicole points across the hall.

Clustered around a set of lockers, a group of girls with perfect hair, heavy makeup, and suggestive clothing cling to boys with metrosexual taste in fashion and gel-spiked hair. Miniskirts and tight T-shirts abound. Not so different from the populars at Pacific Park [my old school in California].

“Steer clear of them,” Nicole warns. “The Zeus set. Power, privilege, and
partying. They make Paris Hilton look like a Vestal Virgin.”

The Zeus set? I guess I can see how being related to the ruler of all the gods would come with extreme popularity. Who would dare to cross them when you might wind up with a thunderbolt in the back? (pp. 61-62, emphasis present in text)

This description of the descendants adds modern weight to the significance of Zeus and to how positioning according to popularity has implications of power and privilege within a high school and within a culture. The fact that hierarchies exist and discrimination against mortals occurs shows an imperfect power relationship among the gods and among The Academy’s high school cliques in the Oh.My.Gods duology.

Whether the protagonists of this sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels are descendants of gods or are normal humans, they are all the heroes of their story, usually saving themselves emotionally or physically, their families, gods or even the world. In Esther Friesner’s young adult novel, *Temping Fate* (2006) Ilana is a normal girl who gets a job at the D.R. Temp Agency, or the Divine Relief Temp Agency. Her job is to take on the responsibilities and some of the powers of a Greek god she works for, or in her case, the responsibilities of one of the three Fates, who oversee the lengths of people’s lives. Much of the young adult novel deals with the tension of having a first job and adjusting to an employer’s authority over her work. After a week on the job, Ilana is tested by the enchantress, Circe, who is re-presented as the owner of a coffeehouse called the Wymyn’s Koffee Koven in New Haven, Connecticut. Ilana unknowingly drinks a latte that makes her feel empowered. Circe hopes to test if Ilana will use the power to hurt another of the temps. Ilana resists the urge, passing the test.
Circe informs her and several other temps:

“I wanted to see what would happen if you had the power to hurt someone who’d offended you. You chose not to take advantage of that.”

“Well, it’s not like I’ve got that kind of power all the time,” Ilana said.

“Yes, but as one of our temps, you might have access to it, sometime. 

*Unsanctioned* access. There’s no such thing as petty theft when you work for the gods.”

…“It’s not like we *never* get to borrow some of the gods’ powers,” Max put in.

“It’d be kind of hard to do our jobs without it. We’ve just got to know our limits, and they”—he nodded at Circe—“have to know they can trust us not to get carried away with all the mythic mojo.”

The enchantress gave him a look of grudging approval. “Giving too much power to anyone can be a dreadful thing, but it is most dangerous when power falls into the hands of a person who’s never had any at all.” (p. 145)

This emphasis on establishing trust is noteworthy. It focuses on the idea of personal relationships among the mortal protagonists and the gods; the idea of mortals being responsible for their actions and for powers they gain through the elevated position of their association with mythic figures; and to the idea that mortals can help resolve interpersonal conflicts, whether mythic or ordinary.

This sense of responsibility is featured in Ursu’s The Cronus Chronicles trilogy (2006, 2007, 2009). In the first novel, *The Shadow Thieves* (2006), the protagonists, thirteen-year-old Charlotte Mielswetzski and her cousin Zee, solve a mythic sized problem of a potential rebellion in the Underworld when the Greek god Hades fails to
Hades’s disinterest and delegation within his realm is part of a larger theme within the novel that many of the Greek gods have abandoned their creations. Mr. Metos, a teacher and descendant of the God Prometheus—who is a proponent for humanity—confirms the gods’ failings to Charlotte and Zee:

“…I have the charge of Prometheus. The gods created man but do not help him. They’re like parents who abandon their children. Humanity is nothing but a plaything to them, and now, Philonecron is treating people like lab rats. The whole history of man is just like this, the gods…”

But Charlotte had stopped paying attention. (p. 203)

Despite Charlotte’s seeming disinterest, when her cousin, Zee, although uncertain of what is wrong, vows that he and Charlotte should right the wrongs that Philonecron, a demon, has caused, Charlotte reluctantly agrees to help. Zee talks with Charlotte about how all of the children around them have grown ill:

“…It doesn’t make any sense. I can’t figure it out, and I don’t see any way to figure it out. But”—he stepped closer and looked her in the eyes—“that doesn’t matter. There’s only one thing that matters.”

“What’s that?” Charlotte asked.

“How are we going to save everyone?”

Charlotte blinked. She had nothing to say to that.

“We’re the only ones who know what’s going on,” Zee continued. “And no one will believe us. Something really bad is happening, and we need to stop it and we need to save everyone. Or”—he shrugged—“at least I do.” He appraised her.
Charlotte didn’t speak. She felt distinctly like vomiting.

“Anyway.” Zee started walking again. “This has got something to do with me. It’s my responsibility.” (pp. 190-191)

Where the gods have fallen short of the expectations that they should care for humanity, the child protagonists take on the responsibility to save the world.

**Using Protagonists to Play with Positions**

As a reader goes through a novel that potentially operates as myth, she has the opportunity to be influenced by it, to learn about herself and her world. A reader identifies or engages with characters in diverse and complicated ways and from there can use that characters or situations presented in the text as a point of contrast to reflect upon herself and her own experiences as well as those of others; using literature as windows or mirrors (Bishop, 1994, xiv). Susan Lehr notes that when it comes to heroes in children’s literature, “children identify strongly with these mythic boys and girls, who come from real worlds, who dream in epic proportions, and who manage to save the day” (1995, p. 173). Whether characters are inhuman beings or flawed people, whether they are heroic, villainous, funny, curious, ambitious or whether they resemble the individual reader in some way, they may influence who and how a reader takes up the characters’ stories.

When discussing identity formation, it is important to note that learning and social interaction are influential in the way people position and understand themselves and each other or a text. Moje and Luke note that, “Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all
of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify and are identified” (2009, p. 416). I would argue that within this social dimension, readers may react to narratives and novels as a component of these social and cultural interactions. One of the ways people and texts contribute to young readers’ identity formation is through the ways they position the readers through language and exchanges of power. The reader is then able to reflect upon the way she and the characters have been positioned.

Turning to an example from my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels, in the Need series by Carrie Jones (2009, 2010a, 2010b) much of Zara’s identity is formed around her oppositional positioning to pixies and to her own father, a pixie king. At the opening of the second novel, Captivate (2010a), she, her boyfriend, Nick Colt, and other friends work together to find all the pixies and trap them in a mansion in the woods. They are working on writing a guide on how to survive a pixie attack. Many of their social interactions are based around their hatred of pixies. Although Zara is the daughter of a pixie king (and later turned into one herself when a male pixie kissed her), she fears what she might become. She narrates, “The only thing that scares me now is me. The Zara I might become. The Zara I don’t ever want to be” (2009, p. 306).

After Nick is killed by a pixie and is taken to Valhalla by a Norse Valkyrie to become a warrior, Zara’s only hope of getting Nick back is to be transformed into a pixie and go after him herself, even though she knows Nick may hate her if she is a pixie. Zara undergoes the transformation with the help of a pixie king named Astley, but will not
even look at herself in the mirror to see her true pixie form. Instead she applies a glamour to ensure that she looks human:

“Do you still want to see yourself?”

I shake my head hard like a three-year-old.

“Okay. Would you at least like to learn how to assert the glamour?”

“Yes.” That is an easy choice. “I’d be good with never seeing myself like this.”

The blue of my skin seems to shout at me. It seems so ugly now and I know that’s because Nick will think it’s ugly. I stare at my fingers with their fingernails that are ready to lengthen into claws and everything inside me shudders with what I’ve become. (2010a, 244-245)

While Zara fears and even hates what she has become, she still hopes to maintain her humanity. This is complicated by the fact that some of her friends are reluctant to accept her after her transformation. Zara speaks with her best friend Issie, Devyn and Cassidy:

“So you trust me still?”

“Of course!” Issie exclaims while Devyn says flatly, “No.”

Cassidy has moved closer, her knife ready. “Issie, you should grab your knife again.”

“Why? She’s not going to hurt me,” Issie answers. “It’s Zara.”

Pixie Zara,” Devyn corrects. “Not our Zara.”

*Not their Zara.* I close my eyes for a second, trying to not let my frustration overwhelm me. Emotions are so much stronger now they are almost solid. (pp. 260-261, emphasis present in text)
Zara is determined to maintain her positional identity as a mortal human even after she is no longer human and after she begins to realize not all pixies are evil because she and Astley are not evil. Her efforts are complicated by the fact that some of her friends are reluctant to see her as human and say so. The reader is positioned with Zara as she experiences shifts in her identity and can understand her contemplations over good and evil and bigotry as being allegorical. Slowly, throughout the third novel, *Entice* (2010b), Zara begins to accept her new identity as a pixie and even as a pixie queen (p. 6). Zara is surprised when her grandmother, Betty, who had been against Zara transforming, offers her comfort:

> She grabs me by the shoulders, suddenly intense and strong. “You will never be a pixie. You will always be my granddaughter, Zara. That is who you are, damn it. Don’t forget it. We are not defined by our species any more than our nationality or our gender. What we do, our choices, that’s what defines us.”

I have a hard time meeting her eyes. That’s what I’ve always believed too, but somehow I keep forgetting it now that I’ve turned. It’s like I don’t get the benefit of the life rules I make for everyone else. (p. 33)

The reader too may contemplate the idea that identity is shaped by choices, whether these choices are acts of goodness, evil or decisions over word choices that position people and characters within their worlds.

As mentioned previously, Riordan created Percy Jackson and his world specifically for his son and to create a myth in which dyslexia and ADHD are markers of a powerful characterization as a child of a Greek god (Riordan, 2008b). This helps to make the series relatable to young readers with similar diagnoses. But this is not an
exclusive rule. There is no guarantee that any reader will relate to or engage with any characters in a certain way.

When a reader is engaged, she is motivated to read for one or many purposes, she uses knowledge, whether experiential or based on intertextual connections to other works, to create new understandings and she participates in social interactions around reading that is meaningful for her (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Baer, 2005). Sipe and McGuire (2006) note some common responses young readers have to story:

They may, for example, relate the story to their own lives; connect the story to other stories they know; make predictions or interpretations about the plot, setting, characters, or theme of the story; or express their aesthetic satisfaction and enjoyment. (p. 6)

Such responses are all possible with the young adult and middle grade novels incorporated within this sample and study and these responses are evidence of reader engagement. Since individuals’ preferences, experiences, goals, knowledge and previous experiences with reading vary so greatly it is difficult to predict engagement and relatability. When a teacher tries to make recommendations of novels with relatable protagonists to students, there is no exact science to know if that sense of relatablility will be established.

In the first Percy Jackson novel, *The Lightning Thief* (2005), Percy the narrator, may be a relatable character to help young readers access re-presented Greek myths or provide a new myth of perceiving the empowering aspects of ADHD and dyslexia. Within the first chapter, Percy describes himself as a “troubled kid” (p. 1) and shares his struggles as a reader and to feel special. Readers may relate to Percy as a flawed
character with problems. He struggles with reading. He struggles in school. He has trouble maintaining focus. Readers with similar experiences may engage with Percy and may even see him as a guide since, as a character, despite his difficulties, Percy is still able to achieve great things. This could provide readers with a sense of hope that they too can succeed as Percy has done, since his beginning characterization so closely aligns with a potential reader’s own experiences. For me, as a reader who has never been a troubled kid and who has always known both of my parents, I still engage with Percy’s experiences. The series serves as an escape and instead of being a myth about the experience of having ADHD or dyslexia, for me it is the myth of America, exploring the country’s source of power in relation to traditional myth and the way that may contribute to a sense of nationalism (as described in Chapter Five).

Despite the mythic dimensions of Percy’s conflicts, when Percy must face gods or battle monsters, Percy’s narration intentionally reduces the conflicts with gods and monsters to comparisons of the relatable experience of being bullied. For example, after Percy realizes that Ares, the Greek god of war has tricked him for the mythic figure’s own benefit, he faces Ares and thinks: “He reminded me of every bully I’d ever faced: Nancy Bobofit, Clarisse, Smelly Gabe, sarcastic teachers—every jerk who’d called me stupid in school or laughed at me when I’d gotten expelled” (Riordan, 2005, p. 243). Although the reader will not know the experience of standing before a god of war, feeling bullied and tricked, she may recognize the feeling of having been teased or laughed at. This helps to take this moment that is outside the reader’s everyday experience and make the underlying emotions relatable and engaging and may help a reader to learn about herself and her relationships; by contrasting her experience with Percy’s and his
relationships. The conflicts in the series, as with all of the novels in my sample, manage to be both universal and concrete, depending upon how the reader wants to interpret and make meaning for herself. This is a strength of the mythic form, taking universal concerns and relationships and giving them significance on the individual level.

To consider the ways readers may view a hero of myth as a guide in identity formation, I would like to examine a moment from the second novel of Riordan’s Percy Jackson series, *The Sea of Monsters* (2006). Early in the story, Percy must decide whether to embark on an unauthorized quest to save his imprisoned friend, Grover. The messenger god, Hermes, disguised as a jogger, finds Percy on a beach looking at the star constellations and the two have a conversation:

“…Do you have a favorite constellation, Percy?”

…I said, “Uh, I like Hercules.”

“Why?”

“Well…because he had rotten luck. Even worse than mine. It makes me feel better.”

The jogger chuckled. “Not because he was strong and famous and all that?”

“No.” (pp. 99-100).

Percy gains hope and has a better understanding of who he is as a character through comparing himself to a mythic figure, the hero Hercules. This conversation could allow a reader to similarly think about the characters of myth, or Percy, in comparative ways and potentially learn about herself and her goals, strengths and weaknesses. While a reader may also engage with the traditional figures of myth on emotional levels and with the universal tensions presented, some readers may find it easier to engage with Percy and
the other protagonists of re-presented or new myths since these characters’ concerns are sometimes as immediate and relevant to present-day culture as the readers’ own concerns.

Later in the fourth novel, *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008a), Percy arrives at a farm in Texas and makes a deal to clean out the stable of the ranch to improve the living conditions of the farm animals that parallels the fifth of Hercules’s twelve labors in traditional Greek myth. In traditional myth, after Hercules killed his family in a rage, he sought to do penance by completing tasks given to him by Eurystheus the King of Mycenae. For his fifth labor, Eurystheus orders Hercules “to clean the Augean stables in a single day. Augeas had thousands of cattle and their stalls had not been cleared out for years” (Hamilton, 1969, p. 232).

In *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (Riordan, 2008a), Percy is not there to do penance, but rather he and his friends are disheartened by the conditions the animals live in at the Triple G Ranch. While approaching the stables, Percy notes:

I didn’t need to see [the stables], because as soon as we got within three hundred yards I started to smell them. Near the banks of a green river was a horse corral the size of a football field. Stables lined one side of it. About a hundred horses were milling around in the muck—and when I say muck, I mean horse poop. It was the most disgusting thing I’d ever seen, like a poop blizzard had come through and dumped four feet of the stuff overnight. The horses were really gross from wading through it, and the stables were just as bad. It reeked like you would not believe—worse than the garbage boats on the East River. (p. 143)

Disgusted by the conditions, Percy makes a deal with Geryon, the cowherd of Eurytion,
to clean the stables:

Geryon chuckled. “Percy Jackson, those stables haven’t been cleaned in a thousand years…though it’s true I might be able to sell more stable space if all that poop was cleared away.”

“So what have you got to lose?”

The rancher hesitated. “All right, I’ll accept your offer, but you have to get it done by sunset. If you fail, your friends get sold, and I get rich.”

“Deal.” (p. 147).

Percy is initially discouraged as he begins his work. A conversation with a naiad does inspire him to use his power over water to clean the stables. Percy narrates:

There was a tugging sensation in my gut, and the water spots exploded like the world’s largest carwash. Salt water shot twenty feet into the air. The horses went crazy, running back and forth as the geysers sprayed them from all directions.

Mountains of poop began to melt like ice. (p. 154)

This is similar to how traditionally Hercules completed his own labor when he “diverted the courses of two rivers and made them flow through the stables in a great flood that washed out the filth in no time at all” (Hamilton, 1969, p. 232). Although such parallels between the re-presentations and traditional myths are rife throughout the entire Percy Jackson series, this particular re-presentation of one of Hercules’s labors shows a relatable child character in his own hero’s position and succeeding in his cause.

In general, the young protagonists in this sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels are potentially relatable heroes for young readers. They encounter and conquer problems that are both existential and grounded in real experiences of potential
relationships with others, with animals and with the environment. In future studies, researchers could have young readers contemplate the ways they engage with characters of myth and whether they engage more easily with certain mythic figures, certain authors’ approaches to re-presentation and inclusion and whether they prefer traditional presentations or re-presented myths or new emerging myths.

In this chapter, I have explored the personal relationships the young protagonists from my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels have with included mythic figures. Despite the fact that many of the protagonists in my sample have flaws, whether they are relatable conditions like ADHD and dyslexia or whether they are relatable characterizations like bad attitudes, selfish concerns, etc. and whether the gods are family members the child character may draw power from or are an antagonist, the young characters also take on responsibilities, learn from mistakes, save themselves, save others or even save the world. The use of relatable characters may draw the reader into the story to consider the value and realms of myth. The reader may also use the young protagonists as points of comparison to construct meaning about her own life and experiences. This sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels portrays young protagonists as often having complex relationships with the gods and also as relatable and flawed characters who can hold the weight of the world and be trusted by gods and mortals to do good in mythic and ordinary aspects of life. Young readers may also take up their own meanings of; not only in story and in myth, but in their own lives.
Chapter Eight: Sharing re-presented myths and included mythic figures

Guardian of the Dead
Percy Jackson series

Iris, Messenger
Stork

“It’s very curious,” Hulda said, “the way so much that is held as myth or children’s stories are common themes found throughout cultures of the world.”

~Hulda to Katla
Wendy Delsol, Stork, 2010, p. 276

The way I started to see it was that all of us at Lambert High were wrestling with the messes the gods got us into, or we got ourselves into, or our fate designed for us. Whatever. It seems like we’re morphing into creatures of all kinds. Just like in the myths. And we all have our stories—myths, reality, a little bit of both—that somebody knows or everybody knows...or nobody knows.”

~Ovid
Betsy Franco, Metamorphosis: Junior Year, 2009, p. 8

Having examined the expanded realms of myth within this sample of 40 middle grade and young adult children’s novels, the question becomes what are the implications for young readers who pick up these novels at home or in the classroom. There are a number of ways and arguments a teacher could use to present to students the young adult and middle grade novels set in the twenty-first century that include and re-present mythic figures. I would like to focus on how the reader is positioned to think of traditional myths, adding understanding of literary references, allusions and intertextuality and the allowance for multiple interpretations of a text. Readers and teachers may also use some
of the young adult and middle grade novels presented throughout this study or other novels and picturebooks to establish text sets to explore motifs and themes presented across texts and to consider the ways narratives are in conversation in their portrayal of characters, conflicts, cultures, realities and the world.

We are also left with the question of myth’s future. Based upon myth’s prevalence within this sample and beyond it survives and will always survive. As a form, myth is concerned with the way the world, humanity and its gods are structured and positioned in relation to one another. It gives us a place, tells us about our relationships in visible ways. Different myths provide different scaffolds for understanding aspects of life. It is important to contemplate the positions, to consider who is positioned as powerful, as powerless and why. Weighted in its past significance, myth’s concern over tradition and novelty and its present meaning and consideration of the future, myth is a vehicle, easily carrying us forward, giving us a spectacular view to see the world and others.

**Understanding References, Allusions and Intertextuality**

One of the arguments commonly used for the continuing study of traditional myth, particularly Greek and Roman myth, is that novels popular throughout history and within the current era make references and allusions to traditional myth. Allusions are “direct quotes or indirect references to other texts, which often invite comparisons” (Moon, 1999, p. 93). An allusion is a form of intertextuality or description or expression of “the way texts of all kinds are bound together by the broader reading and writing
practices of a culture” (Moon, p. 93). This study has shown that such practices may occur across cultures as well. For readers to better understand novels written recently and in the past, they need knowledge of what has been written previously. Thomas C. Foster describes this phenomenon in his book, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*:

> Because writers and readers share knowledge of a big portion of this body of story, this mythology, when writers use it, we readers recognize it, sometimes to its full extent, sometimes only dimly or only because we know the Looney Tunes version. That recognition makes our experience of literature richer, deeper, more meaningful, so that our own modern stories also matter, also share in the power of myth. (2003, p. 73)

Similarly, Debra A. Moddelmog (1993) notes that readers are often introduced to myth through literature:

> The first way readers can become aware of a myth is when the text (or, if one prefers, the author) briefly alludes to it. This kind of reference is like a signal; it tells us nothing—or very little—about the myth but merely hints that we might find additional evidence of it elsewhere in the story. (p. 17, emphasis present in text)

Literature that uses such allusions provides cornerstones for readers to construct understanding and make meaning from stories and myths.

This approach may be taken up in novels with the idea of the implied reader formed by Wolfgang Iser. He writes, “An obvious and major difference between reading and all forms of social interaction is the fact that with reading there is no face-to-face-situation. A text cannot adapt itself to each reader it comes into contact with” (1989, p.
So, instead of adapting to each reader, assumptions about who the reader is are latent in most texts. Eeds and Wells write that the implied reader “builds meaning based on instructions received from the text” (1989, p. 22). While these ‘instructions’ are often subtle, a more explicit order can draw attention to assumptions about the implied reader. Through the assumptions of knowledge and background about the implied reader, the actual reader is positioned by the story in ways that they can accept or reject.

The use of language to position people is not a new concept. Betsy Rymes (2003) notes that positioning is a common part of discourse and conversation within classrooms:

Every day, in school, teachers and students interpret each other’s words, read into them, and act according to their own presuppositions and expectations. The everydayness of this activity is why it is so powerful, and why close micro-analysis is so important—not to reproduce the assumptions and the “reading into” that goes on everyday, but to uncover this process and explore how this “reading into” reproduces unequal power relations that exist in society more generally. (p. 122)

Such positioning is also constant and shifting. Wortham (2001) notes that “interactional positioning is “ongoing” because in everyday life individuals position themselves in response to how others position them, then the others reposition themselves in response to this positioning, and this process has no end” (p. 151). As a product of a society, such power relations and positionings are present in literature and influence the ways the reader positions herself and understands her abundance or lack of power and knowledge; just as positioning due to expectations of cultural knowledge or knowledge of myth shifts from novel to novel and among the myths and cultures referenced.
In the Percy Jackson series, Riordan seems to play with this potential for the implied reader to have knowledge of the myths and characters included. He tends to introduce mythic figures under pseudonyms, describe them and then delay revealing their true mythic identity for several more pages of narration, playing with the reader’s knowledge.

An example of this occurs in the first novel, *The Lightning Thief* (2005), with Medusa (whose inclusion and re-presentations I have also examined in Chapter Five). After her character introduces herself as “Aunty Em” to Percy, Annabeth and Grover, she is described as wearing scarves, hiding her entire body excluding her hands (p. 173). Her true identity is not revealed for another six pages of dialogue and interaction, but among those pages are other hints to the character’s true identity: Percy, Grover and Annabeth see life-sized statues of people (p. 173), Grover—who has the best hearing—believes he hears a “hissing noise” (p. 175) and after the disguised Medusa gives the children food, Percy thinks, “It was a little unsettling, having someone stare at me when I couldn’t see her face” (p. 175). Throughout the scene, the reader may feel a mounting tension if she suspects the danger Percy and his friends are in. Even if the reader does not recognize Medusa as a threatening figure, she will recognize that Annabeth feels nervous in the stranger’s presence (p. 177) and that Grover recognizes his uncle as one of the statues in Medusa’s collection (p. 178), so the implied reader with no previous knowledge of traditional myth is also aware of the mounting tension of the scene.

This play with the implied reader’s knowledge is not always enjoyable throughout the novels in my sample. As I began this study, I was less familiar with traditional Norse myths than I was with Greek or other myths. When I read the novels *Thief Eyes* (Simner,
2010) and the precursor to this literary trend *Eight Days of Luke* (Jones, 1975), which both include re-presented Norse mythic figures, I noticed the aspects of traditional myth are not always explained within the narration of each novel. I had to seek out secondary sources to help me understand the historical significance of some of the mythic figures; like Hallgerd in *Thief Eyes* and the god Tew in *Eight Days of Luke*. I found it frustrating when my knowledge did not overlap with the expected knowledge of the implied reader. Some readers, who also lack implied knowledge, may not be willing to do research or may need a teacher to fill in the gaps that remain in some of these novels; while still other readers may become resistant to the story and may not bother to finish a novel that expects them to already have knowledge of traditional myth (Sipe & McGuire, 2006).

Generally, when I knew which traditional creature or god was being described, I felt knowledgeable and was positioned by the text to feel powerful because of that knowledge. When I did not recognize a description, I either read faster, feeling an increase in tension as I sought the answer or I did a brief search online to gain insight before the text gave the answer to the character’s identity as the solution to the mini-mystery. In this way, some of the authors within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels play with the possibility of the implied reader who is knowledgeable of traditional myth, while others seem to fall short by expecting such an implied reader without the sense of playfulness. Even in the latter cases, the readers may be aware that clues are being provided to the identity of a mythic figure or to a reference to a particular traditional myth, even if they do not understand the significance. When I was familiar with the myth being referenced, I read to have the story confirm my speculation. When I did not know the character being described, I read to find out who it
was. Either way, I enjoyed the allusions as an extra mystery element as I read.

At first, *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010) also seems to fail to explain its allusions to traditional myth, while re-presenting Māori myths. Although some aspects of the Māori myths are not initially explained, they are paired with allusions to Greek myth to potentially reinforce the allusions’ meanings and to present a less privileged and more inclusive expectation of the reader’s knowledge. For example, Ellie narrates that Mark “smiled as if I were some sort of dazzling divinity—Athena bringing Perseus his Gorgon-slaying sword, maybe. Or Māui beating the sun into submission so that his family could have enough light” (p. 140). Neither of the allusions is directly described in the earlier narrative of the novel. It falls to the reader to know the myths being referenced or to research more details about the Greek goddess Athena assisting Perseus in his quest to slay Medusa and about the often unsuccessful feats of the trickster-hero Māui.

However, the reader’s potential frustration if she does not understand the allusion is put to rest 32 pages later in the case of the specifics of who Māui is when the narration describes him as, “a trickster and a hero, feared and loved, almost a god himself. He’s unbeatable” (p. 172). This again provides some inclusion of play with an implied reader’s assumed knowledge. In this particular case, a reader’s patience is rewarded and an explanation is supplied.

References, allusions and metaphors to traditional myth are also widespread in literature that has little to do with including and re-presenting Ancient gods as Moddelmog (1993) described earlier. For example, in *Alcatraz Versus the Shattered Lens* (2010), by Brandon Sanderson, the fourth novel in the middle grade fantasy *Alcatraz Versus the Evil Librarians* series, the protagonist, thirteen-year-old Alcatraz
alludes to the traditional Greek myth of Atlas, who holds up the world, to describe the weight he feels using his power to break objects on a grand scale to try to turn the tide of a war. Alcatraz narrates:

I felt like I’d just run a marathon while carrying Atlas on my shoulders. And boy, that guy’s gained weight over the years. (Due to all those new stars we’ve discovered in the sky, you see.)

I fell backward to the ground, exhausted. (2010, p. 218, emphasis present in text.) Since the god Atlas is not mentioned at any other point in the series, a reader needs to be familiar with the cannon of traditional myth to understand the simile.

Knowing the significance of metaphors, allusions and expressions that reference traditional myth may become surprisingly important beyond engagement with literature. If an Alaskan governor were campaigning for the position of Vice-President, for example, and was asked what her Achilles Heel was, during a debate with her opponent and if she did not know that “Achilles Heel” means “weakness,” she could embarrass herself in a national public forum (Times Online, 2008).

Multiple Interpretations

Another benefit of using both traditional and re-presented myths with children is that they, like all literature, allow for multiple interpretations. In the young adult novel Halo (2010) by Alexandra Adornetto, the protagonist, an angel named Bethany, notes her love of literature because it allows for multiple interpretations. Her friend and love interest Xavier asks:
“Honestly, what is it you like so much about literature?” he asked with genuine interest. “I hate how there’s no right or wrong answer. Everything’s open to interpretation.”

“Well, I like the way each person can have a completely different understanding of the same word or sentence,” I said. “You can spend hours discussing the meaning behind a poem and have reached no conclusion by the end of it.”

“And that doesn’t frustrate you? Don’t you want to know the answer?”

“Sometimes it’s better to stop trying to make sense of things. Life isn’t clear-cut, there are always gray areas.” (p. 153)

Literature gives light to the gray areas, allowing readers to see and play with positions presented in it.

Myth has the added benefit of lending itself to a cultural significance. Eliade noted, "Myth is an extremely complex cultural reality, which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints” (1963, p. 5). Similarly, Roland Barthes addressed the function of myth, stating, “It is the reader of myths himself [or herself] who must reveal their essential function. How does he receive this particular myth today?” (1972, p. 129, emphasis present in text). Both of these quotations from scholars of myth hint at an underlying question of what is the particular significance a myth has for a particular reader. Eliade and Barthes acknowledge the answer is complex and variable. It has implications for the many ways readers may react to the myths and their re-presentations using reader response theory.

Interpretation varies with the context of how a reader picks up that text. Rosenblatt writes that, “the reading of a particular work at a particular moment by a
particular reader will be a highly complex process. Personal factors will inevitably affect the equation represented by book plus reader” (1995, p. 75). This applies to myth, as well as to young adult and children’s literature and books at large. The meanings and significance a reader gives a story is influenced by his or her past experiences and present concerns. What is more, myths may not be seen as “stable” (Bearne, 2000, p. 183) due to the way the meanings shift in retellings, re-presentations and cultural contexts. This too, may be perceived as a strength. As a culture changes, so too can its myths. Retellings, re-presentations and new myths may reflect the needs of the culture, community, the storyteller and the classroom. Young readers may study different versions of myths to examine their underlying messages and how they vary. They may compare and contrast myths across cultures and times for their varying significance, serving as an exercise to help students understand their own cultures and those of others. A teacher can encourage readers to question for themselves whether they view myths; traditional, re-presented or new; as allegorical, religious, historical or fantastical. They may also look at the way story is used within the classroom to position them and the teacher in their relationships.

Motifs and Themes.

As described in the Introduction, I noted and analyzed motifs and themes that reoccurred throughout the young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample. The following sections present examples of how using motifs and themes for the bases of intertextual analyses may influence interpretation and provide context to show how narratives may be in conversation with one another. This research method may
prove effective in others’ research and in provoking classroom discussions.

An example of a motif comparison: Hungry beasts and disinterested characters.

I would like to demonstrate how a motif may be used in a classroom with a non-myth related example to show how they are also present in other forms of children’s literature. I teach an introductory children’s literature course and I show my undergraduate education students Pierre: A cautionary tale (1962) by Maurice Sendak, Whatever (2005) by William Bee and Penguin (2007) by Polly Dunbar. All three of these picturebooks include the motifs of characters who are not easily impressed and of a lion or tiger eating a child character. I describe to my students how Whatever is a comparable book with similar tensions to Sendak’s Pierre, since contemporary children may be more likely to repeat, “Whatever,” instead of “I don’t care,” when bored.

The books end differently. In Bee’s Whatever (2005), after the boy, Billy, is eaten by a tiger, he calls out to his father to help him from inside the beast, saying, “Dad! I am still in here you know…” (no pagination). His father replies, “Whatever,” implying Billy’s behavior may have been learned from his father (or vice versa). In contrast, at the end of Pierre (Sendak, 1962), his parents rescue Pierre from the lion by taking him to the doctor. When asked how he would like to return home after his rescue, Pierre learns from his experience and announces that he does care how they get there. The picturebook includes a summation of its moral on the last page: “The moral of Pierre is: CARE!” (p. 48).
I tell my students this is an example of intertextuality, meaning that the texts lean upon one another and are in a conversation. To complicate the comparison, I then share *Penguin* (Dunbar, 2007), the most recently published of the three picturebooks. This story is not about a disinterested child though. In contrast to the other two books, Ben, the child, receives a penguin as a gift. More than anything, Ben wants the penguin to say something. Ben keeps making grander and grander efforts to provoke a response, finally by showing the penguin a lion. When the lion eats Ben, the boy gets his wish: The penguin finally acts, biting the lion on the nose so that the beast will regurgitate Ben, alive and well.

The three picturebooks all include the motif of a beast eating a child. But in all three books the significance of the motif differs based upon the context the motif is presented (and read) in and the resulting action in the stories: in one a boy learns to care, another learns that he is cared for by his penguin and in the case of *Whatever*, Billy’s fate is unknown, but it becomes apparent to the implied reader that the a character’s indifference is a learned familial trait.

Such comparisons may be made among book pairs or groupings, positioned together to encourage young readers to think intertextually and to make comparisons among texts. Although the picturebook *Pierre* (Sendak, 1962) is an older picturebook, it may become more accessible when the reader sees Bee and Dunbar’s picturebooks are in conversation with Sendak’s. All three of these stories explore the contexts, behaviors and reactions to a single motif or unit of meaning. I would argue it is even easier to make intertextual interpretations with the 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels in my sample, since they are not only in conversation with one another about what it is to
live in the early twenty-first century world and how to make meaning about it, but they are also in conversation about the realm, history and power of myth.

**An example of a thematic comparison: The perceptions of education in the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels.**

Returning to my sample, a strength of analyzing literature that includes re-presenting mythic figures in modern realistic settings is that cultural critiques of present-day society may be examined with little question of who the challenges are directed since the reader may be aware of the historical and cultural contexts, depending upon her background. A common theme among several of the middle grade and young adult novels within my sample is that of critiquing the public education system of the United States or, as the narrator of Ursu’s Cronus Chronicles trilogy puts it, “the indignities of middle school” (2007, p. 18).

In Sarah Deming’s middle grade novel *Iris, Messenger* (2007), for example, Iris Greenwold hates attending Erebus Middle School because the school “did not like imagination; [the teachers] liked neat handwriting. So they gave Iris lots of detentions, to shake the dreamer out of her” (p. 2). From the novel’s beginning, Iris feels excluded by her school’s focus and as though her strengths are devalued. Later in the story, Iris discovers that her school’s principal is actually Hades, the Greek god of the underworld and that his secretary is his wife, Persephone. When students are sent to his office, the principal regularly gives students impossible tasks to complete as punishments; such as holding a cinder block indefinitely, while facing a corner of his office (p. 138), or filling
a shark-shaped kiddie pool with water using only a spork with a hole drilled in the center of the spoon portion (p. 139); child-friendly versions of the punishments Hades gives in traditional Greek myths.

After Iris is ordered to complete these punishments and others, Hades realizes Iris is a friend to some of the other Greek gods. Iris asks him to stop punishing the students, stating, “I don’t think you should make anybody do those cruel things, no matter who they are” (p. 142). Hades pouts and replies, “But we can’t stop, Iris! Punishment is what we’re best at. Middle school is the closest thing we’ve found to hell” (p. 142, emphasis present in text). Hades equates middle school to the Underworld, a sentiment that is reflected in Iris’s own perception of the school. In her discussion with Hades, Iris goes on to make recommendations to improve the school, starting with hiring new teachers:

“Well,” said Iris, chewing her doughnut and thinking.

“I’ll make you a deal. I won’t tell Zeus about the horrible torture you inflicted upon me, if you agree to stop making kids hold cinder blocks and sit on uncomfortable chairs. And if you try to hire nicer teachers…” Why don’t you hire some of the other gods?” Iris said. “Apollo would be a great music teacher, if he had the time to do it. And I think Dionysus would be awesome for chemistry, at least the part on fermentation. Then you guys would feel more at home.”

Hades looked unconvinced. “That might be a good idea, but if we don’t torture the kids it will be so boring. What will we do to them when they come to our office?”

“Why don’t you tell them a story instead? You gods know so many great stories.”
…“I mean a story might teach them something, not just scare them—a story about love and adventure, something inspiring.” (pp. 142-144, emphasis present in text)

As opposed to being positioned as just a misbehaving student, Iris is now positioned as a person with power due to her association with other Greek gods, as someone whose opinions have value and as someone with whom a god/principal may negotiate with. Not only does Iris encourage uniting a number of the gods, creating a mythic and extraordinary sense to the seemingly ordinary school and its teachers, but she also implies that myths have values and lessons for the students. Much of this negotiation is negated, however, when Iris later makes a deal with Zeus so she will not have to spend the entire year at her middle school. Her negotiation parallels the myth of Persephone, which the goddess tells Iris of in her own words before Iris leaves the principal’s office. Persephone’s arrangement was to stay in the underworld with Hades for six months and to return to her mother, Demeter, for the rest of the year, since she only ate six pomegranate seeds (p. 195). When Iris meets Zeus, her father, he offers to give her something as a boon:

But Iris couldn’t think of anything she wanted. All she had ever wanted her whole life was to feel special, and to have wonderful adventures. Both of those things had already happened. There was something Zeus could help her with, though. He seemed to have a lot of influence with Hades. If governors could get people released from death row, maybe Zeus could get Iris out of middle school. “Do you know how you made that special deal for Persephone, where she only had to stay in hell half the time, since she’d eaten so little?”

“Mmm-hmm.”
“Well, I hardly ever eat anything at the school cafeteria…”

“Done,” he grunted. (p. 195, emphasis present in text)

Instead of adjusting to the school or waiting to see how Hades alters his teaching philosophy, the narration positions Iris’s school to be like a prison and she makes a deal to escape it. Despite the promise of improving Iris’s experience of school, middle school is still a torture to escape for as long as possible. While such an escape is impossible for most young readers, they may relate to Iris’s perception of school. Addressing this theme in *Iris, Messenger* could open up discussion of the pressures and difficulties of school among teachers and their students, allowing the students, as Iris was, to be positioned as powerful and to contribute to a sense of feeling “special” as they negotiate and balance students’ needs with curriculum requirements.

Turning to another example that presents a critical examination of the American education system, Riordan’s *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008a), the fourth Percy Jackson novel, critiques an American education policy. While in the labyrinth situated beneath the United State, Percy, Grover, Annabeth and Percy’s half-brother, a Cyclops named Tyson, encounter the Sphinx.

Traditionally, a sphinx is a monster with the face of a woman and the body of a lion that has wings (Hamilton, 1969, p. 376). She is well known as a character in the story of Oedipus. In Hyginus’s recounting, which was recording in the 4th or 5th century AD in Latin, the Sphinx runs loose, destroying crops, challenging people with riddles and devouring those who do not answer correctly. If a person answered correctly, however, “she would leave the area” (2004, p. 236).

Riordan re-presents the Sphinx as a game show host. She blocks Percy and his
friends’ path through the Labyrinth and challenges them to participate in the game show “Answer That Riddle” before they can move on to another portion of the labyrinth. Annabeth is quick to step forward to answer the Sphinx’s questions, but she is disappointed when the Sphinx asks her basic level math and comprehension questions. Annabeth confronts the mythic figure about the questions she is asking:

“These aren’t riddles,” Annabeth said.

“What do you mean?” the Sphinx snapped. “Of course they are. This test material is specifically designed—”

“It’s just a bunch of dumb, random facts,” Annabeth insisted. “Riddles are supposed to make you think.”

“Think?” The Sphinx frowned. “How am I supposed to test whether you can think? That’s ridiculous! Now, how much force is required—”

“Stop!” Annabeth insisted. “This is a stupid test.”

“Um, Annabeth,” Grover cut in nervously. “Maybe you should just, you know, finish first and complain later?”

“I’m a child of Athena,” she insisted. “And this is an insult to my intelligence. I won’t answer these questions.”

Part of me was impressed with her for standing up like that. But part of me thought her pride was going to get us all killed.

The spotlights glared. The Sphinx’s eyes glittered pure black.

“Why then, my dear,” the monster said calmly. “If you won’t pass, you fail. And since we can’t allow any children to be held back, you’ll be EATEN!” (p. 184)

The mention of “since we can’t allow any children to be held back” brings to mind the
No Child Left Behind initiative, with those students who fail to meet testing standards facing a future much worse than just being left behind. The Sphinx, a dangerous creature of great wisdom, has been re-presented as an enforcer of mediocrity instead of a philosopher encouraging deep thought in this cultural critique. Through these re-presentations and metaphors testing, the experience of being a student and the ways American schools are run are critiqued in various ways; just as other aspects of modern-day life have been, reinforcing the central idea that myth—whether traditional versions, reinterpretations, re-presentations, religions or personal narratives—help define the world and reality and position people within them for those who speak, listen, write, read, watch and live myth.

*Other motifs and themes included in re-presented myths within this sample.*

Throughout the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels I examined, there are a number of other themes and motifs that I noticed but did not explicitly explore within my analysis of my sample for this study because they did not contribute to the larger argument of the other chapters or because they would have interrupted the flow of discussion within the body of this study.

Below is a list and summary of some of the more notable themes and motifs that could be used to inspire essays or spark discussion among students who are familiar with several of these novels or series. Analyzing some of these motifs and themes could become areas of future study. The topics are varied and include such issues as the way gender and race are presented, the important role a character’s nightly dreams often plays
in the story, the way a character’s emotional transformations can be reflected physically, etc. I have included examples of young adult and middle grade children’s novels from outside the scope of my sample to reinforce how some of these motifs and themes are common beyond the sample and the specific publishing trend analyzed within this study.

*An appreciation for myth.*

Many of the novels I examined include characters who see the value of literature and particularly the importance of being knowledgeable about myth. By including content from ancient myth, the novels include the underlying assumption that there is value in knowing myth. This assumption is a central theme or repeated argument within the novels. In the Cronus Chronicles trilogy (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009), the thirteen-year-old protagonist, Charlotte Mielswetzski is excited when her new teacher leads a unit on Greek myths. She notes that she is “rather knowledgeable” (2006, p. 27) about the subject. She is described as engaging with the stories visually:

She loved Greek myths; they were all such good stories. When she was young, she had had a big atlas-size book of them that she read again and again. She would lay the book flat on the ground and trace over the illustrations with her fingers. She could still see the pictures when she closed her eyes—of poor vain Arachne, who was turned into a spider by Athena, crawling across the tapestry that had offended the goddess; of foolish Pandora, who opened the box that let all the world’s evils out; of Perseus flying away triumphantly with the Gorgon’s head. The only ones she hadn’t liked were the pictures from the stories about the
This reflection on Charlotte’s engagement with a book of Greek myths shows her enjoyment of them. The narration shares glimpses or striking images of some myths, leaving gaps for the reader to fill with her own imagination or knowledge of myth. Charlotte also models one way of engaging with picturebook retellings of traditional myths. Her knowledge of Greek myths is useful throughout the plots of the Cronus Chronicles trilogy and her dislike for the stories about the underworld foreshadows the events of the first book, *The Shadow Thieves* (2006) in which she must travel to the Underworld.

*Iris, Messenger* (Deming, 2007) is also incorporates this theme. Triggering Iris’s adventure to meet and hear retellings of myths from the gods themselves, she receives a book on Greek mythology that states:

They [the Greek gods] belong now not to the department of theology, but to those of literature and taste. There they still hold their place, and will continue to hold it, for they are too closely connected with the finest productions of poetry and art, both ancient and modern, to pass into oblivion. (pp. 12-13)

This is comparable to the content of the textbooks analyzed in Chapter One; a justification for the relevancy of myth that is then reinforced by Iris’s later adventures to meet many of the Greek gods.

In a different approach, when Ellie learns that a Māori fairy, or a patupaiarehe, named Reka, threatens the life of her best friend, Kevin, in *Guardian of the Dead* (Healey, 2010), she turns to the local university’s Māori folklore section hoping to find a way to help Kevin:
Most of the books on my printed list were still on the dull metal shelves of the Folklore section. I took them all down, settled myself at a spare desk nearby, and tried to concentrate over the thrumming in my veins.

The results weren’t reassuring. Not every book mentioned the fairy people, but those that did all mentioned their immense magical power and incredible sacredness. Cooked food or its smell were non-sacred, and could drive them off or keep them away, which explained Reka’s “allergy.” …Mostly, the books agreed that they were beautiful, but there were plenty of more monstrous figures too, like men with huge claws for fingers and a taste for human flesh. There was a story about a giant patupaiarehe woman who had a beak for a mouth and speared birds upon it, and one about a man who took the form of a giant lizard, although another book with the same story classed that one as a taniwha, one of the huge, man-eating water monster-guardians.

…Clearly, though, it was possible to beat Reka. In most of the stories, the humans encountering patupaiarehe avoided potential disaster.

Even as I finished that thought, I saw the problem with my smugness. Of course, I could only read the stories based on the tales of survivors. How many people had simply vanished, their stories never told? (pp. 149-150)

Ellie turns to folklore for guidance from the past to know how to deal with her present situation, carefully examining the narratives for guidance, demonstrating the importance of keeping records of folklore.
Dreams that foretell, warn or recall.

In Halo (Adornetto, 2010), the Hush, Hush series (Fitzpatrick, 2009, 2010), the Gods of Manhattan trilogy (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010), Troy High (Norris, 2010, not a part of the sample), the Heroes of Olympus series (Riordan, 2010b), the Kane Chronicles (Riordan, 2010a), the Percy Jackson series (Riordan, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009), the Cronus Chronicles trilogy (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009), and the Maggie Quinn: Girl Vs. Evil series (Clement-Moore, 2007, 2008, 2009, not a part of the sample) the motif of protagonists’ dreams often serve important purposes of warning them about the future, of demonstrating their connection to another character or of reminding them of their past or connection to myth. For example, in The Red Pyramid (Riordan, 2010a), the first novel of the Kane Chronicles, Carter, who is beginning to learn about his magical powers and about those of the Egyptian gods, knows that the world is in danger because of a dream he has. His uncle explains that this is because he is more susceptible to the Duat world, or the Egyptian mythic realm, while asleep:

“The Duat is the world of spirits and magic. It exists beneath the waking world like a vast ocean, with many layers and regions. We submerged just under its surface last night to reach New York, because travel through the Duat is much faster. Carter, your consciousness also passed through its shallowest currents as you slept, which is how you witnessed what happened in Phoenix. Fortunately, you survived the experience. But the deeper you go into the Duat, the more horrible things you encounter, and the more difficult it is to return. There are entire realms filled with demons, palaces where the gods exist in their pure forms,
so powerful their mere presence would burn a human to ashes. There are prisons that hold beings of unspeakable evil, and some chasms so deep and chaotic that not even the gods dare explore them. Now that your powers are stirring, you must not sleep without protection, or you leave yourself open to attacks from the Duat or…unintended journeys through it.” (pp. 81-82).

Uncle Amos presents the idea that the mythic realm is accessible during sleep. In this particular case, there is a sense of danger with going to sleep, reflecting potential sleep anxiety.

In *Crescendo* (2010), the second novel in Becca Fitzpatrick’s Hush, Hush series, dreams are shared and the protagonist Nora mentions that she read, “dreams are a way of reconciling what’s happening in our lives” (p. 124). Within her dreams, Nora sees flashbacks to the conflicts among angels and humans that occurred centuries before. She and talks with her ex-boyfriend, an angel named Patch, in a dream.

The motif of dreams may also be analyzed in terms of the Jungian concepts of archetypes and to the collective unconscious. Kamenetsky (1992) writes about Carl Jung and his predecessor famed psychologist Sigmund Freud:

Both Sigmund Freud and his student C.G. Jung realized that myths and folktales speak in symbols corresponding to the unconscious elements in our lives. While Freud drew upon certain analogies in dreams, fears, phobias, and repressions, as well as in the hope for wish fulfillment, Jung spoke in much broader cultural terms about the “collective unconscious.” Both perceived in myths and folktales certain symbols that corresponded to elements of the unconscious, but Jung also saw in them the quest for an inner renewal through archetypes. What he expected
from a participation in the unconscious forces was an elevation above an experience that was singular and unique toward one that had been shared throughout the ages by mankind. (p. 270).

Jung in particular would argue for deeper symbolic connections, the potential for universal meaning making and the place dream images arguably share among people and across cultures.

*Good Versus Evil.*


Many of the protagonists carefully considered the nature of good and evil and the complicated middle ground within this thematic dichotomy. Notable among these young adult and middle grade novels is Carrie Jones’s approach in her young adult, paranormal romance Need series (2009, 2010a, 2010b). Zara, the protagonist, is characterized as someone who wants to do good in the world. She regularly speaks against persecution in other countries by writing emails for Amnesty International. After realizing the risk a few pixies pose to humans during the events of the first novel in the series, *Need* (2009),
she and her boyfriend, a werewolf named Nick, and other friends attempt to imprison every pixie they encounter. In the second novel of the series, *Captivate* (2010a), Zara is forced to question her assumption that all pixies are evil as she battles a pixie right after her boyfriend is fatally wounded by another pixie. Zara argues with the pixie over the fact that she and her friends had imprisoned them:

“I trapped you because you’re monsters. I force out the words. “My father [a pixie king who was also imprisoned] is a monster.”

“Monsters? Why? Because we admit to the pain we cause? Admit we like it? Instead of pretending we’re some sort of warrior hero like your wolf [Nick].” She sneers. Her posture tightens. She’s going to jump me.

“He is a hero. He protects people from things like you.”

“And you.” She sniffs. She smiles. “I can smell the pixie in you.”

“I’m not like you,” I growl.

“No. You’re not. You cloak your evil, your violence, in the mask of good. I am just evil.” She leaps. (2010a, p. 176)

Zara battles and kills the female pixie, noting “We all fall today” (p. 176). Later, Zara transforms into a pixie herself in the hopes of being able to rescue Nick from Valhalla. She contemplates some of the things she has done in the past, which she had justified because she was trying to save people. She tells her friend Devyn, “We trapped people in a house. That’s illegal. It’s technically kidnapping. We fight them. That’s assault. I beat one guy up after the dance” (2010b, p. 37). She begins to question her own choices and prejudices, while hoping to still do good in the future despite her slow realization that good and evil may not be absolutes. While all of the protagonists choose the side of good
within these 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels that incorporate mythic figures, many of them seriously contemplate the nature of good and evil.

Losing, Keeping or Gaining Memories.

In the Fallen series (Kate, 2009, 2010), the Heroes of Olympus series (Riordan, 2010b), the Need series, (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), the New Policeman trilogy (Thompson, 2007, 2008, 2010) and in the novels Halo (Adornetto, 2010), Guardian of the Dead (Healey, 2010) and Thief Eyes (Simner, 2010), characters’ memories are stolen from them and they have to struggle without them or fight to regain what they have lost. This motif often serves as a device to trigger a journey of self-discovery or to have the protagonist question who they can trust.

Human memory can also be important to the gods. In Thief Eyes (Simner, 2010), Iris, Messenger (Deming, 2007) and the Gods of Manhattan trilogy (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010), among others, the gods’ continuing existence is dependent upon mortals remembering them. In Gods of Manhattan (Mebus, 2008), people and parts of Manhattan may only enter the spirit world if they are “important enough, loved enough, feared enough, imagined enough, remembered enough” (p. 59, emphasis present in text). It is through memory that the gods of traditional myth survive and new gods are created.

Several of the re-presented mythic figures worry about being forgotten. In Iris, Messenger (Deming, 2007), Iris discusses the Greek gods’ survival with Athena and Artemis. The goddesses note that as long as their stories survive, they do as well.

Artemis states:
“Look at us, Iris, lingering past the time when our powers were full. We wane and wane. Now we are like the moon in its tiniest sliver.”

“Ah, but the moon always waxes again, Sister,” said Athena, “and we never will.”

“True,” said Artemis, and she reached out for Athena’s hand. “We will continue to fade until nothing is left of us but the poems and the statues and the old stories.”

Iris couldn’t stop the tears now, but she didn’t know if she was crying for herself or for the goddesses.

“Ah, Iris. This is the way things are.” Athena reached out for Iris’s hand, and Artemis took the other, so that they stood in a circle: the two grown women and the small girl. Iris felt electricity flow through their joined hands. As she looked at the goddesses, it seemed to her that Artemis was naked and shone like the moon. Athena was covered in gleaming armor with a plumed helmet hiding her face. When Athena spoke again, her voice was the one warriors had heard on ancient battlefields, urging them on to glory.

“That’s why it is important for you to know these stories, Iris. As long as they are alive, we are alive, too.” (pp. 164-165, emphasis present in text)

This use of memory focuses on the ways ideas, paradigms, stories, gods may survive over time.

New York City is the center of the universe.

In Mebus’s Gods of Manhattan trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010), Marsh’s The Night
Tourist (2007) and The Twilight Prisoner (2009), Riordan’s Percy Jackson series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009) and Springer’s Dusssie (2007), the setting of New York City and the inclusion of historic New Yorkers play roles in the novels that reinforce those peoples’ positions in the city’s formation and reinforce the unique aspects of the city, often romanticizing it. In Marsh’s The Twilight Prisoner, the history of many parts of the city is revealed as the protagonist Jack Perdu travels through it. For example, when Jack is trying to choose a place to take his friend Cora on a date, his father suggests Columbia University because the Manhattan Project was started there. His father informs him:

“A group of physicists started it at Columbia during World War II. The cyclotron was one of the first machines they split atoms in.”

Jack felt himself becoming interested...“And is it still there?”

“Part of it supposedly is, a giant electromagnet in the basement of Pupin Hall. The physicists used the network of tunnels under the university to transport radioactive material in and out of Pupin.”

“Really?” said Jack.

His father rubbed his hands together, warming to his subject. “The university keeps Pupin locked, but there was a story some years back that a student sneaked down through the tunnels and brought back some uranium. He didn’t like his roommate, so he stored it under the guy’s bed.”

“That sounds like an urban myth,” said Jack. (p. 25)

Jack decides to take Cora and another classmate, Austin, into the tunnels beneath Pupin Hall, although they do not find any equipment from the Manhattan Project, it is there that Jack finds an entryway into the New York City underworld that is guarded by Charon,
the gatekeeper (p. 40).

*Dusssie* (2007) by Nancy Springer is set in SoHo in New York City. Despite the fact that Dusie, the daughter of a Greek gorgon, has sprouted snakes in place of her hair, she need only put on a hat to prevent people on the street noticing that she is marked and positioned as different. She narrates:

I glanced around to see whether anybody noticed that I was talking to myself and my hat was moving. But, duh, no problem. This was New York. Just like in midtown, people hurried by, barely noticing the violinists or the mimes or the dancers or me. All kinds of people. (p. 98)

Percy Jackson expresses a similar sentiment about New York City in the final novel of the series, *The Last Olympian* (Riordan, 2009), stating, “I love New York. You can pop out of the Underworld in Central Park, hail a taxi, head down Fifth Avenue with a giant hellhound loping along behind you, and nobody even looks at you funny” (p 141). Both of these books express New York City’s uniqueness in its acceptance of the presence of the unusual.

The repeated focus on New York City as a setting throughout the sample reinforces how unique aspects of the city, the city’s history and how real places enter into these novels and have a sense of being mythic.

*Overcoming death or resurrection from death.*

In novels including the Hush, Hush series (Fitzpatrick, 2009, 2010), the Need series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b), the Night Tourist duology (Marsh, 2007, 2009), the
Gods of Manhattan series (Mebus, 2008, 2009, 2010), the first Percy Jackson novel, *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan, 2005), the Kane Chronicles (Riordan, 2010a), *Thief Eyes* (Simner, 2010), and others, death is often portrayed as a reversible condition or a state from which a person may be rescued. In the case of *The Lightning Thief*, Percy Jackson successfully travels to the Greek Underworld and restores his mother’s life. The theme of death often demonstrates anxiety over mortality, losing a loved one and explores the experience of losing a caregiver. These novels may also serve as escapes for readers to hope for closure or that those they love will always be there to protect them, providing the reader with a sense of security.

In Ursu’s the Cronus Chronicles (2006, 2007, 2009), one of the predominant themes is death: The Greek Underworld is re-presented, Charlotte, one of the protagonists, almost dies and as the other protagonist, Zee, witnesses his grandmother’s peaceful death. Grandmother Winter speaks to him for the last time:

> And then she beckoned him closer, and he leaned toward her, and she smiled a little and told him, firmly and truly, “I will always watch over you. Never doubt that.”

He did not doubt her, not one bit. You never doubt Grandmother Winter. In that moment Zee—who had never considered an afterlife, and even if he had, certainly would not have believed in it—felt with his entire body, from his toes to his tear-filled eyes, that she was telling the truth. (p. 111)

His grandmother’s death becomes a source of belief in life after death for Zee and the fact that her death is so peaceful and that she contemplates her own death, noting, “she had never been dead, and it seemed an interesting thing to be” (p. 97) makes the idea of death
seem less scary for the reader. Plus, in the rich descriptions of the Underworld, the reader is presented with a tangible myth of what happens after death and Charlotte and Zee fight to ensure all of the dead are treated well; eventually making a deal with Zeus at the end of the trilogy (2009, p. 498).

In the case of *The Night Tourist*, Jack seeks out his deceased mother in the New York City underworld to come to terms with why she died. He also attempts to bring his ghost friend, Euri, back to life, but is unsuccessful in his attempt. In the sequel, *The Twilight Prisoner* (2009), Euri herself has trouble admitting that she committed suicide and Jack struggles to choose if he wants to live or remain in the underworld, since there is already “something dead about” him (p. 212). The novel incorporates ideology about choosing to live and about the need for people to value themselves. At the novel’s conclusion, Jack chooses to battle his depression:

For a moment, he felt the temptation to indulge in despair…There was only one choice. He pumped his legs, closed his eyes, and forced himself to smile. Snowflakes melted against his eyelashes, kissing his face. He suddenly felt loved—not just by the world, but by himself. (p. 246)

Jack chooses to live, believing in his value as a person and having seen the ramifications of suicide from Euri’s experiences.

*Going Bovine* (Bray, 2009) also explores death as the protagonist, 16-year-old Cameron, comes to terms with and tries to make sense of his own approaching death to mad cow disease.
Many of the novels in my sample incorporate protagonists and characters from many different racial backgrounds implying that the traditional myths of one culture may now be re-presented and belong to readers from various backgrounds. For example, a discussion Phoebe has with her new school’s headmaster, Damian, who teaches the descendants of the gods in Childs’s young adult novel *Oh.My.Gods.* (2008), implies that people from many different countries and cultures can be the descendants of the Greek gods. Damian informs Phoebe:

“You are not the only non-Greek to attend the Academy. We are primarily a boarding school and many, if not most, of our students are from abroad. Our ancestors were not, shall we say, confined to a particular geographical area.” (p. 35)

A similar multiracial and multiethnic reality is also presented in both of Riordan’s Percy Jackson (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009) and Heroes of Olympus series (2010b). Characters from any background, no matter their class, race or beliefs may be the children of gods.

In *Iris, Messenger* (Deming, 2007), the Greek gods themselves are re-presented as being more racially inclusive. Athena is marked as being racially different from the other deities. Iris notes the goddess of wisdom’s appearance at their first meeting, observing, “Athena was Asian, with short-cropped black hair and startling gray eyes. She was dressed like a martial artist, in a silken gi, with a long curved sword at her side” (p. 161, emphasis present in text). The story does not explain why Athena is described in racial
terms, while most of the other gods are not. Aphrodite’s beauty is described as being beyond categorization according to race, Iris feels “like she could spend the rest of her life looking at Aphrodite’s face. With her olive skin and dark almond shaped eyes, Aphrodite could have been from any place, from any age. She was beauty itself” (p. 100). While I certainly can see the value that “beauty itself” is not restricted to the purview of one race, examining this novel in terms of its approach to racial inclusion could be an interesting exercise for further research.

References to popular culture.

Novels within my sample like the Oh.My.Gods. duology (Childs, 2008, 2009), the Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy (Wood, 2007, 2008, 2009), Temping Fate (Friesner, 2006) and the Need series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) include the motif of referencing popular culture, celebrities and modern media. For example, in Temping Fate, the protagonist, Ilana, who has gotten a summer job as a temp, has just discovered her temp position is with the Fates who decide how long all mortals live. One of the Fates, Clotho, who is using the name Tabby, explains to Ilana:

“We are the Fates. We spin and measure and cut the life-threads of every human being on this planet. We don’t kid around.”

Tabby raised one hand. A long, golden spindle suddenly glittered in her grasp. Some kids might have recognized it from the old Sleeping Beauty video, but Ilana had seen the real thing being put to practical use by the women in a dozen African villages, twisting raw fibers like wool or cotton into thread. (p. 39, emphasis
Ilana’s mention of the *Sleeping Beauty* Disney cartoon (Geronimi, 1959) provides a sense of familiarity to the reader, who, depending upon her background, may be familiar with the cartoon. Such references also show the continuing relevance of mythic figures in other popular stories.

In Carrie Jones’s Need series (2009, 2010a, 2010b), one of the characters and Zara’s best friend, Issie, regularly refers to the television series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997) to help explain the mythic dimensions of the problems she, Zara and their other friends face. For example, near the end of the second novel, *Captivate* (2010a), Zara has just learned that the world may be ending. She and her friends, Devyn and Issie, discuss the possibility:

“Anyway, he [a professor] referenced this ancient book, *The Vercelli Homilies*, which talks about Satan being the mouth of this goliath dragon reaching up to swallow the world. It was first referenced in 800 BC as the Crack of Doom. Fenrir [a wolf from Norse myth] was this ancient wolf monster who will be killed by Vidar. That’s the myth that happened first. The Christians adopted the image.”

“I have no clue what you’re talking about,” I tell him.

“It’s the myth. It’s the myth behind what’s happening now. You know, with the Valhalla stuff. The myth says there will be a massive battle. Fenrir will try to swallow the world.” Devyn looks to Is for help.

“It’s also on *Buffy!*” Issie pipes up. “The high school was right on a hell mouth and every season Buffy had to stop the apocalypse and stuff so Sunnydale didn’t
get all sucked in with the rest of the earth following.”

“What?” I don’t get it.

“Why don’t you watch *Buffy*?” Issie pouts. “I have all of them downloaded. I’m always begging you. You’d totally get this if you did.” (pp. 264-265)

Such references to television shows, movies, celebrities, etc. not only demonstrate myth’s continuing presence in popular culture, but sometimes connect these re-presentations to powerful dialogues that are relevant in popular discussions and help to give myth a sense of being timely. Writing about Santa Claus’s evolution within American culture, Russell Belk has noted, “As Malinowski [1976] suggested, myths are mirrors for culture and reflect its social practices, changing when these practices change. That modern myths are partly shaped and changed by commercial and media institutions makes them no less revealing of modern culture” (1993, p. 77). The re-presentations of mythic figures in other forms or media within popular culture is another potential avenue of future research.

*Transformations between human and animal forms.*

Several of the novels I analyzed for this study included the motif of characters who transformed into animals or objects. In myths, this ability to shift form is a god-like power, often connected to a character’s identity, empowerment or lack of power. In the New Policeman trilogy (Thompson, 2007, 2008, 2010) only fairies and their changling children (fairies raised in the human world) have the power to turn into animals (Aengus transforms into a raven and has the power to turn humans into pigs.) Likewise in the
Cronus Chronicles (2006, 2007, 2009), it is the Greek gods or their objects of power, like Poseidon’s trident, that turn humans into creatures. Jane Garry writes about this common motif:

The very broad category of transformation is one of the most fundamental motifs in storytelling. A basic impulse in telling and listening to stories is a desire for escape from the everyday world, and stories involving magical transformations, while providing imaginative escape for the audience, often involve literal escape of the characters, as when someone changes from one form into another to avoid being caught by a pursuer…In the case of voluntary transformation, the process is called shape-shifting; when one is transformed by another, it is called enchantment or bewitchment. (2005, p. 125)

For teenage characters within my sample shape-shifting may also represent the way they change as characters or try on different positions and identities.

In the realistic novella, Metamorphosis: Junior Year (Franco, 2009), which is not an official part of my sample, the descriptions and portraits that Ovid, the protagonist, makes of his friends transforming into animals works as showing how “People are so unpredictable, so scary, so layered” (p. 24). Through metaphor, Ovid describes how his friend Myrra is transformed into myrrh tree because of her experiences of incestuous rape

In another example from Metamorphosis: Junior Year, Ovid describes the way many high school students shift and transform:

It seems to me that we all navigate our way through high school—solo or in ever-shifting pairs or groups—trying to find some rhyme or rhythm, some sense.

Sometimes we throw light on our faces, letting other people get a glimpse of us.
Then we retreat.

Seems like we’re all just groping our way through a labyrinth, fighting our personal minotaurs, morphing into who we really are, like it or not. And along the way, we cross paths with other people. (p. 109).

Through a metaphor connecting the experience of high school to being in Minos’s labyrinth and hunted by a minotaur, Ovid focuses on his friends and his transformations to find themselves and their voices. In this case, transformation is human and natural as teenagers figure out who they are.

This motif takes on similar connotations in Riordan’s *The Red Pyramid* (2010a). When Carter and Sadie Kane transform into birds, the only way for them to restore themselves to their human forms is to remember who they are as humans. The god Horus cautions Carter that, “*it takes willpower to stay human*” while in bird form (p. 260, emphasis present in text). “*The more time you spend as a bird of prey, the more you think like one*” and the easier it is to lose sense of what it is to be human (p. 260, emphasis present in text). Sadie in particular has difficulty with this and almost becomes trapped as a bird because she has trouble finding an idea that is “powerful enough to remind [her] of who [she] was” (p. 278).

In *Thief Eyes* (Simner, 2010), the teenage boy Ari’s ability to turn into a polar bear wakes when he follows Haley into a mythic realm. He is told to “Remember, boy. Remember why your father’s ancestors wore the bearskin coat long ago. Remember!” (p. 67) and Ari transforms against his will into a bear, a part of his ancestry. He later enjoys this transformation between being a bear and a human. In future studies with this motif, it may be relevant to note whether the character is willingly transformed or forced. Also,
in both *The Red Pyramid* (Riordan, 2010a) and *Thief Eyes* (Simner, 2010), memories serve an important part in the transformations. Avi must call upon the power of his ancestors to become a bear and Sadie must remember who she is as a person to return to her human shape.

This motif is also included in *Why I Let My Hair Grow Out* (Wood, 2007), when Morgan becomes a mermaid, or merrow, to save a missing girl; in *American Born Chinese* (Yang, 2006) in which both Jin and the Monkey King have trouble accepting themselves and their true forms; in *Temping Fate* (Friesner, 2006) in which the male interns may be turned into pigs as punishment for not following the rules of the Wymyn’s Koffee Koven café; in Chadda’s *Dark Goddess* (2010) in which Billi is bitten by a werewolf and she fights off the transformation through the strength of her willpower (p. 272), in *Guardian of the Dead*, in which Ellie is almost transformed against her will into a tree (Healey, 2010), in the Need Series (Jones, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) in which several characters are were-animals and in which the protagonist, Zara, struggles with her transformation into a pixie (2010a, p. 234-236), in the Cronus Chronicles trilogy (Ursu, 2006, 2007, 2009) in which Zee’s grandmother chooses to reincarnate as a cat so she can watch over him after her death.

*The truth of myth is hidden.*

Many of the novels I examined include the motif that the reality of the mythic figures’ continuing existence in the realistic modern settings is a secret. Often a plot device like a mist (which is used in Riordan’s Percy Jackson and Heroes of Olympus
series), a plot device that characters must be awakened (as in Healey’s *Guardian of the Dead*) to see the mythic elements of the world is incorporated. Other novels present the argument that most people ignore the truth before them (as in Mebus’s *Gods of Manhattan* series) and are used to explain how the majority of people in the modern settings are unaware of the continuing existence of myth and mythic figures in their daily lives.

Although not an official part of my sample but noteworthy to how some of these devices and arguments are also made in many fantasy narratives, the Secrets of the Immortal Nicholas Flamel series (Scott, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) also includes this motif and presents it in the second novel of the series. In *The Magician* (Scott, 2008) one of the protagonists, fifteen-year-old Sophie Newman, discusses with the immortals and historic figures Saint-Germain and his wife Joan of Arc how the traditional gods, or Elder race, have avoided detection by ordinary humans:

Sophie shook her head in disbelief. “You can’t hide something like that forever.”

“The Elders have been doing it for millennia,” Saint-Germain said…“And you have to remember that humankind really does not want to believe in magic. They don’t want to know that myths and legends were almost always based on truth.”

Joan reached over and laid her hand gently on her husband’s arm. “But I do not agree; humans have always believed in magic. It is only in these last few centuries that the belief has fallen away. I think that they really want to believe, because in their hearts they know it to be true. They know that magic really exists.”

“I used to believe in magic,” Sophie said very quietly. (p. 398)
Underlying the use of this motif is a plot device to explain the fantastic elements of the stories, while still maintaining the realistic settings. This motif also contains the central idea that if the reader is open to, awake, or searching for mythic dimensions in their own world, they may find them or interpret experiences accordingly.

**Implications of Other Areas for Future Research**

Having spent several years exploring the way myth is integrated in young adult and middle grade children’s novels, I am aware that questions for further study remain:

To what extent do individual readers internalize the examples of traditional, re-presented and new heroes or protagonists and use them to position themselves; perhaps with thoughts like “If Percy Jackson or Hercules could...then I can too?” Do readers find it easier to engage with myths set in the present-day world or do they prefer to seek and interpret the significance of mythic narratives set in a fantastic realm? Do readers who engage with narratives that re-present mingling mythic systems have a more accepting stance toward people who ascribe to different paradigms or worldviews than them? What are the implications of critically exploring the concept of myth in a classroom setting and how will noting myth’s expanded realms influence young readers’ understandings of the world, reality, heroism, and of the ways they position themselves? What implications may be discerned from children’s literature that include or re-present folklore, legend and fairytale characters and plots? Are the novels that re-present folktales and legends, like *Sisters Red* (Pearce, 2010), *Avalon High* (Cabot, 2006) and the Grimm Sisters series (Buckley, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009, 2010) discussed in Chapter
One accessing the same realms or doing the same work as myth? What are some other new myths that are emerging among cultures? All of these avenues of research extend upon the questions addressed in this study.

**Looking to the Future and Clinging to the Past: A summary of findings and a contemplation of the implications of this study**

As noted in other chapters and among the motifs and themes discussed, memory often plays an important role in myth. The survival of myth and its figures depends upon people to retell and to re-present those stories, to share the gods and creatures with each successive generation, to hold some meanings constant and to evolve others with the time, setting and culture.

What is often at stake with re-presenting traditional myth is the tension—the question—of whether to cling to tradition, to old ways, to a familiar interpretation of structuring the world or whether to embrace the novice and new, to adapt or change a way of understanding the world, to find a paradigm that better fits experience or that provides new meaning.

This tension is exemplified well in Wendy Delsol’s young adult novel, *Stork* (2010). It is important to note, although there are many mythological and magical dimensions to the story, no mythic figures actually appear, meaning this novel is not an official part of my sample. Nonetheless, *Stork* takes up many of the tensions and themes contemplated and presented within my sample and looks to the future to establish positions for both tradition and the novel. In the story, 16-year-old Katla Leblanc, or Kat,
moves to her mother’s hometown of Norse Falls, Minnesota after her parents’ divorce. Much of the town is infused with Icelandic tradition, including the use of Icelandic words and names into everyday conversation. One of the high school traditions features an Asking Fire, in which the girls may write down the names of boys they would like to go with to the homecoming dance. Kat tells her father about the schools’ traditions over the phone:

“Tomorrow, though, there’s some sort of bonfire going on, a school tradition. Some band’s gonna play.”


I went all rubbery. I had to stop for fear of bouncing off the sidewalk. If only he knew the half of it. “Something like that.” Had we been speaking in person, I might have told him more about the Asking Fire. He would have scoffed loud and long. (p. 91)

Despite the infusion of rituals and Icelandic traditions, the town faces many potential changes. Developers want to tear down the historical downtown and consolidate the high school with another town’s.

The townswoman and only remaining business owner preventing the developments from moving forward is Hulda, an elderly woman who owns both a fabric store and an abandoned paper factory. She advises Kat as the teenager learns that she, like Hulda, is a stork; a woman destined to assign the souls of unborn children to vessels, or mothers, to raise them. During Kat’s first meeting with the storks, Hulda notes, “We live to see many changes.” Hulda spoke with authority. “It is not for us to question. It is
for us to accept” (p. 12). Later, when Kat encourages her father to develop a deal to lease the abandoned paper mill and use it to produce wind turbines for Japanese investors, she has him meet with Hulda. As they tour the abandoned Inga Paper Mill factory, Hulda asserts:

“The bamboo that bends in the wind is stronger than the oak that resists.” Hulda looked at him expectantly. “I speak of change here.”

“Change can be good, I suppose,” my dad said, but I could tell he was just humoring her.

“One more thing. Listen carefully. Karma is the turning of the wheel and is very important to the ancient religions of the Orient. Is much like fate, but they believe karma is our will as we swim in the river of our past and present. We cannot change the course of the river, but the strokes of our swim influence our destination. This you must tell your investors.”

“Uh. I’ll tell them if it comes up,” my dad said.

Hulda gave him a sharp eye and, again, his shoulders snapped back. I heard the ping. “You bring it up. You tell them at the Inga Paper Mill, and you must use the full name, an old woman told you that karma is the turning of the wheel.” She pointed at him with a crooked finger. “You will see.” (pp. 247-248)

A part of the change Hulda sees for the city is to accommodate other cultures and to see the connections among their beliefs.

The Japanese investors do agree to lease the paper mill after Kat’s father shares what Hulda had said to them. He tells Kat, “When I told them the name of the factory was the Inga Paper Mill, they just about flipped. Inga is the Japanese word for fate or
“karma” (p. 270, emphasis present in text). Hulda’s wisdom and accommodation of other cultures is not by chance, it is her way of controlling the direction of the flow of change. She notes that the changes decided upon for the town are “good for everyone. New jobs. New prosperity. Some old stores stay. Some new come in. Is mixing the past and present. Compromise. Winds of change” (p. 312).

Likewise, myth is both tradition and change. It accommodates both necessities and it directs people to look to the future. It leads us forward and it pulls us back. But still, the threat against tradition, the fear of losing myth, of forgetting the gods are tensions explored in many of the young adult and middle grade children’s novels in my sample.

Early in the final novel of the Percy Jackson series, The Last Olympian (2009), Percy is injured in an explosion and thrust into the depths of the sea. With his half-brother Tyson, he looks underwater for his father, the god Poseidon; who is at war with the Octeanus, the Titan god of the sea. Percy almost does not recognize Poseidon when he sees him:

“Percy, excuse my appearance. The war has been hard on me.”

“But you’re immortal,” I said quietly. “You can look…any way you want.”

“I reflect the state of my realm,” he said. “And right now that state is quite grim.” (p. 36).

Later in this conversation, Percy fears for his father’s life, for the first time, thinking, “Gods weren’t supposed to die, but I’d seen it happen. Even if they didn’t die, they could be reduced to nearly nothing, exiled, imprisoned in the depths of Tartarus like Kronos had been.” (p. 41). The gods and creatures of myth need a space, a realm, a people to
remember them for them to exist. The young adult and children’s novels in this sample offer that space, that realm, that memory. These re-presentations have brought myth out of the primordial space and into present-day societies. In some cases, myth’s presence is a threat, in others it is a source of empowerment.

Although most of the novels I have analyzed focus on the myths of Ancient Greece, the literary trend of re-presentation is expanding to incorporate multiple cultures and systems of belief. These ideologically-driven narratives are shifting to portray unions among mythic figures from different mythologies and systems of belief, demonstrating parallels and tensions among worldviews and portraying the hope of union and peaceful co-existence; just as the people who read, hear or believe in these stories must also co-exist and unite to navigate global societies and concerns. The inclusions and re-presentations of mythic figures in these novels allow young readers to play with ideas of who they are, of what myth is, which realms it encompasses, what reality is, what they choose to believe, how they understand their world, how they position themselves within it and who they will become.

No matter the myths people read, see or hear, it is important to examine the ways they are presented and re-presented for the ideological implications; to know how they position people in the world, position them to one another; to ask who is included in each worldview, who is privileged, who is excluded and who is united. Children’s literature has always been weighted by ideology, but as the young adult and middle grade novels I analyzed demonstrate, children’s literature has been taking on questions and tensions of mythic proportions and have been presenting young adult and child protagonists who feel loved, empowered and are able and may be trusted to save themselves, their families,
friends and the world.

In this chapter, I have explored how the young adult and middle grade children’s novels comprising my sample may be used to help young readers understand allusions and the concept of intertextuality. I have examined the way the sampled novels position the reader and encourage multiple interpretations of the stories’ meanings. I have also demonstrated how content analysis and the examinations of plots, common motifs and themes among narratives provide points of comparison to make meaning across texts. I have also listed questions and avenues for future research and have contemplated the future of myth as well; describing it as an ongoing process that encourages the reader to look to the past, the present and the future as she considers tensions between tradition and novelty, inclusion and exclusion, power and powerlessness, reality and fantasy and life and death.
Conclusion: A summary of findings and a contemplation of the future of myth

“That’s why it is important for you to know these stories, Iris. As long as they are alive, we are alive, too.”

~The goddess Athena to Iris
Sarah Deming, Iris, Messenger, 2007 p. 165

Within the mid to late first decade of the 2000s, a trend in young adult and middle grade children’s publishing has been to include mythic figures or characters from traditional myth in realistic early twenty-first century settings. For my dissertation research, I chose to analyze this trend.

Restatement of the Problem and My Questions

Being aware of this publishing trend in young adult and middle grade children’s novels, I was left with the problem of whether these novels should be considered myth or whether they were expanding the nature of myth, the purpose myth was serving in these novels and the way the stories encouraged the reader to think about myth. I wanted to know how these novels expanded or limited the definition and realm of myth and the significance or positions myth and its characters are given when repackaged within early twenty-first century realistic settings.
I asked the questions:

- What is the place and time of myth in each novel?
- Are the gods and mythic creatures solely those of one ancient culture, multiple mingling cultures or are other creatures, people or figures positioned as being gods?
- What are the mythic figures’ relevance in the novels and their relationships to the young protagonists?
- What are the implications for the meanings of myth, reality and cultures presented within the children’s novels? Among other questions.

To answer these questions, I established a sample of 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels published between 2005 and 2010 that include characters from traditional myth or figures from history in modern settings and analyzed them for the use of myth, common themes and common motifs.

**Restatement of My Methodology**

Using a formalist approach to content analysis and tracing common motifs and themes across my sample of 40 young adult and middle grade children’s novels published between 2005 and 2010, I examined the way myth and characters of myth are being used and positioned to explore present-day life and contemporary concerns, to present the importance of traditional myth and to see what or whom is being positioned as potential new modern day myths.

I examined the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels for the
following realms or dimensions of myth:

(1) the ways time and place are presented.
(2) Whether the stories present themselves as fantasy or challenge understandings of reality.
(3) The ideological implications of the stories that have present-day significance.
(4) Whether the gods or characters of myth from different cultures or systems of belief interact within a single children’s novel or series and
(5) The types of relationships the middle grade and young adult protagonists have with the gods or other mythic figures included and re-presented from ancient tradition.

These lenses provided the frame of my analysis as well as the scaffolding for how to structure my analysis within this study.

**Restatement of My Findings**

Through my analysis of the 40 young adult and middle grade novels within my sample, I found the following insights about this trend in children’s literature. If these young adult and middle grade children’s novels portray anything, it is that myths of many cultures and times are alive and well in the early twenty-first century world.

- As discussed in Chapter One, despite the tendency that when people often speak of myth, it is assumed to be relegated to the realm of a distant past or of presenting untruth. I compared the categorization of myth to other folklore genres. I examined the way Plato regarded myth and examined a
scene from *Iris, Messenger* (Deming, 2007) from his perspective and found that despite the humanization and the imperfect characterizations of the Greek gods, this middle grade novel and others like it from my sample do important work in helping young readers to make sense of the world and of mythic and relatable concerns.

• Within Chapter Two, I focused upon the way literature has been analyzed for its use of myth previously; focusing upon the studies of C.W. Sullivan III (1989) and Eric J. Ziolkowski (1996). I define my own terms, mythic figures, inclusion and re-presentation; which are used throughout this study.

• In Chapter Three, I examined how within my sample, the realms of myth are expanded beyond the time of *long ago* and the place of an unrecognizable origin world and are brought into a world and time familiar to the reader. The time of primordial myth is accessed through ritual in *Thief Eyes* (Simner, 2010). Other novels within my sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels re-present time as a cycle, interweaving fiction and history or as reversible events. The place of myth is re-presented as being familiar locations, often mapped onto place or limited to a specific land that may cause these familiar realistic places to seem extraordinary.

• Within Chapter Four, I examined the ways the sampled young adult and middle grade children’s novels explore reality and how the majority of the protagonists find their initial worldviews are challenged when they
encounter a mythic figure. The characters experience paradigms in conflict. As paradigms or scaffolds for understanding the world, representations of myth are sometimes positioned in conflict or as avoiding conflict with scientific or predominant religious views.

- In Chapter Five, I included definitions of ideology and analyzed the ways the young adult and middle grade novels within my sample are weighted in messages about how they reader may understand femininity, environmentalism, nationalism, among other ideas. This chapter also establishes a definition for new myth to examine how historic figures or other characters are positioned as gods.

- Throughout Chapter Six, I explore the way Riordan’s three series privilege traditional Greek and Roman myth over that of the Ancient Egyptians. A sub-set of the young adult and middle grade children’s novels within my sample, however, have presented many worldviews as co-existing, promoting understanding and respect for one another’s perceptions of the world in a global society.

- Within Chapter Seven, I delineated how novels within my sample include protagonists who have personal relationships with gods or other mythic figures. Whether antagonistic or more friendly, these relationships always demonstrate that the child or young adult protagonists are responsible; able to save themselves, others or the world and may be trusted to wield great power.

- Within Chapter Eight, I discussed some of the implications of my findings
and research and how readers may experience different understandings of the world and positions of power or powerlessness with these characters as they contemplate mythic and life-altering conflicts and concerns. Using the characters within this sample, readers may contemplate the characterizations or positionings and make comparisons to reflect upon who they are, who they want to be and the myths within their lives. This sample of literature may also be used to provide information about traditional myths that may be essential to understand allusions common in literature.

This summation of my findings demonstrates that myth is still very much present in contemporary society and is being used to shape and scaffold the way individuals perceive the world, their experiences and themselves through the medium of children’s novels.

**Restatement of the Significance of This Study**

I have found that, as a form, myth is a vehicle for sharing about worldviews, cultures and the individual. It is weighted in ideas about how the world and life may be understood. Myths carry cultural knowledge of the past and imbed themselves as metaphor and allegory in literature and culture. They are often altered to include modern significances as a part of their survival. Myths surround us. They live, they flow, they ebb, they change with the people who speak of them, who write them and who discuss their potential meanings. As long as there are people who share narratives, love stories,
shape themselves and their worlds with their beliefs and with words, there will be myth.

Some of the young adult and middle grade children’s novels that re-present historic pasts as myth lend a sense of nationalism, just as the Grimm brothers collected oral tales to try to create a sense of Germanism in the nineteenth century. Myths empower, explain and welcome readers and listeners into a place in the world. Of course, depending upon the story, readers are left to question whether it is the position they want. Myths give us insights into other cultures, other times, insights into our time, our lives and positions in our societies and insights into ourselves. Maurice Saxby notes:

At the heart of mythology—mythos, a story—is imagination, creativity, the urge to understand, to explain and to embellish. Throughout the ages all cultures have developed a body of myth and legend, at first as an oral tradition, then ultimately fixed in clay, stone, papyrus, vellum or paper and elevated to literature—if not always to sacred lore and belief. (1996, p. 166).

The future of myth is uncertain in terms of the media it will be portrayed within, but its existence, its presence and evolution are certain. Because myth reveals so much of who we are as individuals, as families, as communities and as cultures, it is important to reflect upon and analyze the messages and significance we give it.

Restatement of Some of the Implications of This Study and Possible Avenues for Future Research

As implications of this work, further research tracing common motifs and themes across novels may be an avenue of further content analysis. This study demonstrates the
importance of examining the content of children’s literature for underlying ideology and the implications of the messages being incorporated within story and within the privileged and powerful form of myth. This study has also demonstrated that myth is not just stories belonging to an ancient past. Myth’s continuing presence can take many forms and presentations besides those of re-presenting ancient stories and including mythic figures. If I were to turn to examine present-day American culture at the end of 2010 for new emerging myths, I could reflect upon the worship of celebrity culture as an example of gods walking among the mortals. Saxby notes that the desire for stars in modern media and pop culture, whether athletes, “entertainers or even humanitarians is also indicative of the same urge to worship that has give[n] lasting life to the legendary folk heroes from around the world” (1996, p. 169). I could also question who or what makes a culture or folk hero, a god, a goddess or a mythic figure. With the rich vampire trend in adult and young adult literature over the later-half of the last decade, I could argue that vampires are gods or mythic figures of a new mythic system, offering life everlasting to those they deem worthy.

As a new myth, vampire denominations are observed among readers and viewers: There is the Twilight Saga denomination of people who choose to believe their vampire gods sparkle, people who could extrapolate from their vampire novels of choice that they should wait for marriage to have sex, people who could go on pilgrimages to Forks, Washington, a sacred place. All of these implications may be drawn from the popularity and the sometimes-obsessive allegiance readers give to Stephenie Meyer’s re-presentation of mythic vampires figures in her Twilight Saga (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).

Other vampire readers and viewers may prefer the denominations established by

The young adult House of Night series by P.C. Cast and Kristin Cast (2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) is set in Tulsa, Oklahoma and gives voice to the tensions between Christianity or the “People of Faith” (2007a, p. 22) and the vampire followers of the goddess, Nyx, who says she is “known by many names…Changing Woman, Gaea, A’akuluujjusi, Kuan Yin, Grandmother Spider, and even Dawn” (p. 39). The series explores the conflict between faiths and concerns over expressing sexuality, becoming a myth that explores issues of acceptance, love, inclusion and exclusion. The House of Night series blends vampires and myth to address the concerns of young adults.

Looking for emerging myths works on a personal level as well. As somebody who is devoted to children’s literature, I have trouble viewing some of my favorite authors as being fallible humans, just like I am. In my mind, they are built up, positioned as oracles, bringers of truth and wisdom in narrative form to help me better understand my own world, my position in it, my experiences and to imagine worlds, positions and experiences beyond those I could ever have.

Other avenues of future research include incorporating some of the novels from this sample of 40 young adult and middle grade novels for classroom or reading group use and having the readers reflect upon how the novels influence their understanding of the world, reality, myth, etc. Researchers could also examine how legend, fairytale and folktales are treated in children’s novels and whether they encompass the same realms as
myth or whether they do different work. This is a largely unexplored aspect of children’s literature that is worthy of study.

Conclusions

Who or whatever the gods are in our lives, they provide ways to understand the world. When mythic or historic figures, whether ancient or new, are re-presented and included in children’s novels for young readers, they are voices of authority who may help provide information about the past, present and possible worlds, about who the readers can choose to be, how they can interact with those around them and position themselves within society and among cultures.

Although some of the novels that include mythic figures in my sample often reinforce traditional views of such characters, others challenge those presentations, shifting gods and their significance. Some challenge beliefs about the world and reality, others encourage deeper understanding of predominant paradigms. This literary trend is growing and beginning to address, what I consider to be one of the most necessary realms of re-presented myth, the ways different mythic systems or multiple systems of belief may interact or coexist. As believers and nonbelievers in different mythic paradigms must interact, so too must their gods to show the way, to provide young readers with examples of choices and positions they could face and understandings they could reach.

The possible worlds and relationships in all of these novels present choices. Readers have choices over the books they pick up, over the stories they make their own, over the ideologies they pull inward, over the stories they use to position themselves
within a society, over the ways they make sense of the world and the stories they call upon or believe in to decide their relationships to others, their community, their faith, their country, their world. Moddelmog, who I quoted previously, also noted that readers are “participants in a dialogue—a dialogue involving numerous texts and that is, finally, interminable” (1993, p. 15). The way readers understand myth does not exist in a vacuum. They participate in giving it meaning. Influenced by context and their own backgrounds and experiences, readers shape myth with their interpretations, give it the weight of meaning, of significance, of truth, of belief. Myth is in our hands, our thoughts, our voices, our lives, our past, our present and, most certainly, in our future.
Literature Citations


Routledge.


Longman.


Appendix A: Summaries of the sample of young adult and middle grade children’s novels which include mythic figures

“Each god is different. But all my brethren are free now, all finding places in this modern world of yours.”

~The Goddess Nut

Rick Riordan, The Red Pyramid, 2010a, p. 251

Included in this appendix are the general summaries of the tensions, plots or characterizations of the 40 individual middle grade and young adult novels or series that officially comprise my study. All of the novels were published between 2005 and 2010, include mythic figures as characters, acknowledging those characters’ past positions within traditional myth or history and made use of present-day realistic settings to represent these figures.

With each novel or series, I have included notations of which chapters of this study the books are featured or mentioned in. For a novel or series to be “featured” in a given chapter of this study, I had to have drawn quotations from it multiple times; as opposed to a novel or series that is merely “mentioned” in a chapter—in which case I usually only quoted from it once within the entire chapter or the quotations did not form a central argument of the chapter.

Although some of the disparities over how extensively the novels are incorporated
into this study in its entirety are due to the number of issues relating to myth raised within a given text (and for which longer novels or series had more pages to introduce more questions over the nature or realms of myth). In a few cases, such as with the Devil’s Kiss series (Chadda, 2009, 2010) and the New Policeman trilogy (2007, 2008, 2010), much of my study and arguments had already been crafted with examples chosen from other novels before I read these specific young adult novels. Few places remained to incorporate the novels since they, despite presenting interesting points about the way myth is re-presented within the sample, reinforced points I had already made using other novels or series.

*American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang

This graphic novel is the story of Jin Wang who, as an American born Chinese boy, initially has trouble fitting into and meeting the cultural expectation of his white middle class American community. He and his best friend Wei-Chin eventually part ways after a fight over Jin’s desire to assimilate. The novel also shares the story of Danny, a seemingly white American boy who is embarrassed by his cousin Chin-Kee, who has come to visit him. The graphic novel also re-presents the myth of the Monkey King, who seeks to be treated as an equal among the other gods by denying who he is as a monkey. *(Featured in Chapters Three and Five. Mentioned in Chapters Two and Eight.)*

*The Cronus Chronicles* trilogy by Anne Ursu (*The Shadow Thieves, The Siren Song and The Immortal Fire*)

Charlotte Mielswetzski thinks her life is pretty ordinary, but dreams of having an
adventure. When her British cousin Zachary Miller, or Zee, moves to live with her, Charlotte learns that he has a secret that will draw them into preventing a revolt by Philonecron, an immortal grandson of Poseidon, against the Greek god Hades in the underworld. As the cousins battle Philonecron and eventually meet other Greek mythic figures, they realize the gods have abandoned both the living and dead humans.

In the second novel, *The Siren Song* (2008) the cousins must deal with Philonecron’s revenge as Charlotte is sent into a trap on a cruise along the East Coast and Zee is captured by Philonecron, who is now intent on conquering the entire world instead of just the Underworld. The third novel maintains these tensions as the cousins try to restore order to the world and among the gods to ensure humanity’s survival.

*(Featured in Chapter Seven. Mentioned in Chapters One, Four, Five and Eight.)*

**Devil’s Kiss series by Sarwat Chadda (Devil’s Kiss and Dark Goddess)**

Fifteen-year-old Billi SanGreal is training to become one of the Knights Templar; an ancient Christian organization, led by her father, that fights The Dark Conflict or “the Bataille Ténébreuse” to defeat the forces of darkness. After her mother’s murder five years before, her father gave Billi no choice but to join the Knights. As Billi struggles with her desire to have a normal life, a fallen archangel, Michael, arrives and causes catastrophes in London. In the second novel, a young girl named Vasilisa, whose family has been killed faces the same future of serving the Knights Templar or being killed if Billi cannot protect Vasilisa from the mythic figure Baba Yaga, who is intent on ridding the world of humanity.

*(Featured in Chapter One. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters Five and Eight.)*
**Dussie by Nancy Springer**

The morning after Dusie has her first menstrual period, she wakes to discover that her hair has turned into snakes. She learns that her mother is one of the sisters of the Greek creature Medusa and that they both must suffer her curse. Dusie works to manage her snakes and to better understand them and herself in the hope of conquering the curse.

*(Featured in Chapter Five. Mentioned in Chapter Eight.)*

**Fallen series by Lauren Kate (Fallen and Torment)**

After a fiery accident that killed a boy she liked, 17-year-old Luce Price is sent to Sword & Cross, a reform school in Savannah, Georgia. Luce, who has always seen shadows in the corners of her vision, was unable to explain how the fire began. At her new school, the shadows grow bolder and she is torn between two boys, Cam and Daniel. Luce learns that she has loved Daniel, a fallen angel, before in many past lives that she reincarnates and falls in love with him every 17 years. This time, the cycle of her reincarnation may be broken since, for the first time since Daniel fell, Luce has not been baptized or committed to religious belief and is agnostic. Because of this, many different sects of angels want to kill her.

In the second novel, *Torment*, Luce goes into hiding and attends Shorline, a school near Fort Bragg in California, where many descendants of angels, Nephilim, are. She decides she wants to explore the shadows and learn more about her past lives.

Other novels within this series are published outside the timeframe of my sample.

*(Featured in Chapter One. Mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Eight.)*
Gods of Manhattan trilogy by Scott Mebus (Gods of Manhattan, Spirits in the Park and The Sorcerer’s Secret)

Thirteen-year-old Rory Hennessy learns that magic exists and that he is a “Light,” capable of seeing “truth” and the ways that myth and magic are layered realities upon the world he has always known. He and his sister, Bridget, are drawn into a battle for power among the gods of the city and the spirits of the Munsee Indians that once inhabited the land. The gods of Mannahatta, the mythical realm of the city, are figures from the city’s history including artists, athletes and politicians associated with the city. Many other magical creatures also inhabit the island and influence mortals. Rory and Bridget also hope to discover why their father left their family years before.

(Featured in Chapters Four, Five and Seven. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters Three and Eight.)

Going Bovine by Libba Bray

Sixteen-year-old Cameron is diagnosed with mad cow disease. As his health deteriorates, an angel approaches him with a quest that may allow him to save his life and the world. On his journey, he befriends the Norse god Balder, who is trapped in the form of a yard gnome. As Cameron travels across the American South, there are moments when he still appears to be back in his hospital bed in Texas, presenting the question of which of Cameron’s experiences are “real.”

(Featured in Chapter Four. Mentioned in Chapter Eight.)
Guardian of the Dead by Karen Healey

Ellie Spencer is a student at Mansfield College boarding school in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her only friend there, Kevin, a descendant of the Ngāi Tahu Māori tribe, recruits her to help with a local university’s production of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. One of the actresses in the cast seems strange to Ellie, like sometimes she is missing the pupils and irises from her eyes. Also, a serial killer has been making his way across New Zealand, murdering people and stealing their eyes. Ellie slowly realizes that she has the ability of “double vision,” to see both reality and the world of myth and that she and people like her are the target of a killer, or killers, who hope to regain immortality by overwhelming a Māori goddess with millions of human dead.

(Featured in Chapters Three and Eight. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters One, Four and Five.)

Halo series by Alexandra Adornetto (Halo)

Bethany, an angel, and her two siblings, the archangel Gabriel and another angel named Ivy, have arrived in the seaside town of Venus Cove with the mission to restore faith among the humans there. Bethany falls in love with a mortal boy named Xavier, risking their mission and the possibility that she will become a fallen angel.

Later books in this series are published outside of the scope of my sample.

(Featured in Chapters One and Five. Mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Eight.)

Heroes of Olympus series by Rick Riordan (The Lost Hero)

In this subsequent series to the Percy Jackson novels, Jason, Piper and Leo are three
teenage demigods had remained unclaimed by their deity-parents despite the requirement that they should have been told of their parentage. The three are at the center of a new prophecy that threatens the future of Camp Half-Blood and the Western world as the goddess Gaia threatens to wake and send the entire world into chaos. The Greek demigods must work together with Roman ones to save the world and go on a quest reminiscent of that of Jason and the Argonauts.

There are more books within this series that are published after the timeframe of my sample.

*(Featured in Chapter Six. Mentioned in Chapters Five and Eight.)*

**Hush, Hush series by Becca Fitzpatrick (Hush, Hush and Crescendo)**

Nora, a tenth-grader whose father died the previous year, is strangely attracted to a new student and her new biology partner, Patch. As she gives in to her attraction to him, she learns that he is a fallen angel who wishes to be human and who now must protect her from other angels and children of angels, or Nephilim, who wish to do her harm.

There are more novels in this series that are published outside the timeframe of my sample.

*(Featured in Chapter Four. Mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Eight.)*

**Iris, Messenger by Sarah Deming**

Twelve-year-old Iris hates attending her middle school. When she is given a book about the Greek gods and, later, a magical rainbow-colored shawl as birthday gifts, she travels by rainbow to encounter Greek gods who live in and around Pennsylvania and hears
some of their stories of the past; retellings of a selection of Greek myths. Iris attempts to help some of them while also trying to help earn money for her mother who has lost her job.

*(Featured in Chapters One, Four, Seven and Eight. Mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Three.)*

**Kane Chronicles by Rick Riordan (The Red Pyramid)**

Sadie and Carter Kane are brother and sister but were raised separately. While in the British Museum in London, their father disappears while casting a spell. The two learn that their family has magical powers and they embark on a quest to restore their family and to maintain the balance of power among the Egyptian gods.

There are other novels within this series that are published outside the timeframe of my sample.

*(Featured in Chapters Five and Six. Mentioned in Chapters Three, Four and Eight.)*

**Need series by Carrie Jones (Need, Captivate and Entice)**

After her stepfather’s death, Zara White moves to Bedford, Maine to live with her grandmother. In her new snowy town, a number of teenage boys go missing. Zara also feels as though somebody is watching her from the woods, calling for her to come to him. She soon discovers that pixies and were-animals exist and that she is the daughter of a pixie king. Although the first book does not include any mythic figures from traditional myth, the second and third novels include Norse Valkyries and a hunt to find a way to Valhalla to rescue Zara’s werewolf boyfriend, Nick Colt, who has been taken to be one of
Odin’s warriors in an approaching battle.

Other novels within this series are published beyond the timeframe of my sample.

(Featured in Chapter Five and Seven. Mentioned in Chapter Three.)

The New Policeman trilogy by Kate Thompson  (*The New Policeman, The Last of the High Kings and The White Horse Trick*)

In the town of Kinvara in Ireland, time always seems to be too short. In an effort to find more time for his mother, fifteen-year-old J.J. Liddy travels to Tír na nÓg, the mythic land of eternal youth. J.J. learns that his musically-inclined family’s superstitions are real and that their talents come from the fairies. J.J. must find a leak that is causing time to enter the mythic realm and that could be the death of the fairies.

In the second novel, *The Last of the High Kings* (2008) J.J. is now a father and he and his family must deal with trying to raise Jenny, a changling child, or a fairy child who must grow to adulthood before returning to Tír na nÓg. A púka, or a god of the material realm also wants to take back the world from humans, since they are destroying the environment.

The third book, *The White Horse Trick* (2010), is not included in my analysis since it is set in a dystopian future in which global warming has damaged much of Ireland’s natural environment. The novel follows J.J. and his children as some of them try to save what is left of humanity before the world ends.

(Featured in Chapter Four. Mentioned in Chapters Three, Five and Eight)
The Night Tourist duology by Katherine Marsh  (*The Night Tourist* and *The Twilight Prisoner*)

Jack Perdu travels to the New York City underworld where he learns about his past and must evade capture from the three-headed Cerberus and the New York historical ghosts who inhabit the city at night. *The Night Tourist* alludes heavily to the myth of Orpheus. And *The Twilight Prisoner* alludes to the myth of Persephone and Hades. New York City celebrities and historic figures are included as some of the featured ghosts Jack meets in the city’s underworld.

*(Featured in Chapter Five. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters Three and Eight.)*


Phoebe’s mother has fallen in love with the headmaster of a school that caters to the descendents of the gods of Greek myth on a small Greek island. Phoebe is given no choice but to move to Serifopoula in the Aegean Sea and attend courses with the descendents of gods. Most of the students discriminate against Phoebe because she is mortal. Although Phoebe is waiting for the year to be over so she can obtain a running scholarship and attend college in California, she still manages to develop a crush and make a friend or two among the Academy’s students. After Phoebe adjusts to life on the island and learns she is a descendant of Nike, she must learn to control her powers.

*(Featured in Chapters One and Seven. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters Three and Eight.)*
Percy Jackson has ADHD and is dyslexic. After he is attacked by several monsters, he learns that the gods and monsters of Greek myths exist. Although he finds safety along with other demigods (or the children of gods) at Camp-Half-Blood, he and the other campers go on quests to maintain the balances of power and order among the gods and their children and eventually help fight a war against the Titan god, Kronos, who wants, along with other less powerful demigods and their children, to take power back from the gods of Olympus.

(Featured in Chapters One, Three, Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Mentioned in the Introduction, Chapters Two and Four.)

Temping Fate by Esther Friesner
Ilana Newhouse is having trouble finding a summer job due to her attitude problem. But, lucky for her, the D.R. Temps Agency, or the Divine Relief Temp Agency, welcomes attitude. On her first day temping, Ilana learns that she is actually taking on the jobs of one of the three fates, as her sister did before her. She and the other temps work for the gods and must learn not to abuse the powers they borrow from the gods of traditional Greek, Norse and Hawaiian myths.

(Featured in Chapter Seven. Mentioned in Chapters Two, Four and Eight.)

Thief Eyes by Janni Lee Simner
Haley and her father have arrived in Iceland. While her father is there to research
Icelandic earthquakes, Haley is there in search of her mother who disappeared there last summer. She soon learns that an ancient ancestor, Hallgerd, had cast a spell hoping to change places with one of her descendants to avoid an unwanted marriage, entrapping Haley’s mother. The spell has caused instability and fissures in the earth. Now Hallgerd’s spell has fallen on Haley, who, along with Ari, an Icelandic teen who learns that he can transform into a polar bear when the sun sets, must travel among realms, trying to avoid conflicts with the gods and beasts of Norse mythology to end Hallgerd’s spell and prevent Iceland from breaking apart. Much of the conflicts are derived from the plot and characterizations in Njal’s Saga (1988).

(Featured in Chapter Three. Mentioned in Chapters One, Four and Eight.)

Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy by Maryrose Wood (Why I Let My Hair Grow Out, How I Found the Perfect Dress and What I Wore to Save the World)

After her boyfriend breaks up with her, Morgan’s parents send her to Ireland for a summer biking tour. While there, she travels to the fairy realm and learns that she is “Morganne,” a part-goddess fairy princess. After she returns home to Connecticut, she must manage her long distance relationship with her new Irish boyfriend, Colin, who had been her tour guide in Ireland. She must also deal with the fairies who keep re-emerging in her life and may even threaten to blur the lines between reality and fantasy.

(Featured in Chapters One, Three and Seven. Mentioned in Chapters Four, Five and Eight.)
Appendix B: Table delineating the sampled young adult and middle grade children’s novels’ explorations of the realms of myth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Realms of Myth in Sampled Middle Grade and Young Adult Children’s Novels</th>
<th>The Novels/Series and Authors</th>
<th>Time and Place</th>
<th>Fantasy and Reality</th>
<th>Ideological implications</th>
<th>Mingling gods and mythic systems</th>
<th>Protagonists’ interactions with mythic figures</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Born Chinese</strong> by Gene Luen Yang</td>
<td>While initially there is a clear distinction between the mythic and present-day time and place, later this breaks down and the graphic novel presents the Chinese Monkey King as having entered the present-day story.</td>
<td>Although seemingly separate at first, Jin learns that mythic figures have entered his life in real ways and that mythic figures can disguise their appearances.</td>
<td>The graphic novel explores of what it is to be American and a member of the Chinese American culture. The underlying message is for the characters to be true to themselves.</td>
<td>While only Chinese mythic figures are represented, the graphic novel explores the experience of being Chinese in America, showing the way a mythic system may be adapted over time and within a different cultures.</td>
<td>Gods’ stories may guide mortal characters and the gods may visit modern-day Earth to impart lessons.</td>
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Table 17: The Realms of Myth in Sampled Middle Grade and Young Adult Children’s Novels
Table 17 continued

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<tr>
<th>Time and Place</th>
<th>Fantasy and Reality</th>
<th>Ideological implications</th>
<th>Mingling gods and mythic systems</th>
<th>Protagonists’ interactions with mythic figures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Cronus Chronicles trilogy by Anne Ursu (<em>The Shadow Thieves, The Siren Song, The Immortal Fire</em>)</td>
<td>The series jumps back and forth in time, but all the events occur in the modern era. There are doors to the underworld that most people overlook and a ritual with mythic objects must be completed to find and enter Mount Olympus in Greece.</td>
<td>The mortal characters easily accept that the creatures of myth exist, knowing that they explain some unusual experiences.</td>
<td>Mortal characters take up causes where the gods have failed. The first novel includes a critique of bureaucracy. An overarching theme of the series is to come to terms with death as not being worse than life.</td>
<td>Only Greek myths and creatures are included. Characters who believe the Norse gods are real are implied to be insane (2009, p. 204).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The gods have abandoned humans. Their descendants or human characters must work to correct problems. Many of the gods do not want to be burdened by humanity. The cousins, Charlotte and Zee, are viewed as threats to the gods.</td>
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Table 17 continued

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<tr>
<th>Devil’s Kiss series by Sarwat Chadda (Devil’s Kiss, Dark Goddess)</th>
<th>Set in London in the first novel, the story is set in the present-time but includes flashbacks to Biblical mythic times from the archangel Michael’s memories. The Knights Templar protect a Cursed Mirror, which is a portal to the “Ethereal Realm” (p. 65) where Heaven, Hell and Limbo are. In the second novel the Knights travel to Russia. The concept of time and place are not challenged.</th>
<th>A reality that includes mythic figures in the present-day is assumed from the beginning of the story. The protagonist, Billi, has grown-up knowing that ghuls killed her mother and that angels and other creatures and figures of myth and legend exist.</th>
<th>There are some feminist implications since Billi trains to be the first female Knight Templar and the female werewolves in Dark Goddess find their transformations freeing. The series also explores issues of choice and rebellion and distinguishes among religious practice, faith and sacrifice. The second novel has environmental implications since Baba Yaga wants to restore the natural world.</th>
<th>While most of the myths and legends that inform the series come from multiple cultures and Muslim, Jewish and Christian traditions and understandings of angels, only Christians may join the modern-day Knights Templar (a rule some of the characters contest and others support).</th>
<th>In the first novel, the archangel Michael presents himself as a love interest to Billi only to later reveal his goal to restore faith in the Judeo-Christian God by causing mortals to suffer catastrophes. Baba Yaga also is willing to destroy humanity to fulfill her own goals.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dusssie by Nancy Springer</td>
<td>Set in New York City, the Burroughs figure largely into the setting. Time is explored chronologically, but Dusie’s beginning menstrual cycle begins the story’s plot.</td>
<td>The world built within the novel is very realistic, with the mythic figures re-presented as secret oddities whose true natures must be hidden from ordinary people. Dusie acknowledges that few characters have knowledge of traditional Greek myth.</td>
<td>The middle grade novel explores femininity and presents feminist implications. Dusie’s head snakes may be read as metaphors for her developing womanliness and need to explore and understand who she is.</td>
<td>Only Greek mythic figures are represented.</td>
<td>A traditional gorgon is presented as a mother to a daughter who must manage their family’s ancient curse. The other mythic figures are also supportive of Dusie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and Place</td>
<td>Fantasy and Reality</td>
<td>Ideological implications</td>
<td>Mingling gods and mythic systems</td>
<td>Protagonists’ interactions with mythic figures</td>
<td>Continued</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fallen series by Lauren Kate <em>(Fallen, Torment)</em></td>
<td>Set in Georgia and California in modern times with the occasional flashback, Luce learns she has been reincarnated and that her life cycles are based on her relationship with an immortal angel named Daniel. The cycle may be broken and the end of the world triggered. One of the themes of the series is that the past influences the present. In <em>Torment</em>, Luce is able to travel across space and time through the shadows or announcers that she sees.</td>
<td>After Daniel reveals about her past lives to Luce, she chooses to believe that those lives are real, sensing what he has said is familiar. She tries to learn about her past lives, aware that some of the presentations of reality within the shadows she sees are distorted.</td>
<td>Free will, destiny, the importance of history, a complicated view between good and evil and love are the tensions focused upon in this series. Instead of choosing to have religious faith, Luce believes in eternal love. Also, Luce is attracted to a “bad boy” who initially discourages her affections, showing the appeal of a dangerous love interest.</td>
<td>While the Bible is mentioned and there are traditional elements of Christian belief, the story also includes reincarnation, which is altered to fit the story. The series presents tensions of choosing between good and evil or God and the Devil within the Judeo-Christian mythic system.</td>
<td>The fallen angels interact with humans and the mortals may choose sides among the sects of angels. Mortals and angels may also fall in love with each other.</td>
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<td>Gods of Manhattan trilogy by Scott Mebus <em>(Gods of Manhattan, Spirits in the Park, The Sorcerer’s Secret)</em></td>
<td>Mannahatta and Manhattan overlap in space, but few humans perceive the mythic realm, which included many remembered historic aspects of the city. Central Park has a special position as containing most of the Munsee spirits. The land is presented as remembering the spirits and much of the struggle of the novel is the attempt to get the land to remember the European gods and Americans as well. Time is presented chronologically but places are influenced by history and people’s belief about what happened in the locations.</td>
<td>Mannahatta and Manhattan are separate but influence one another. Only Rory can see the true mythic reality that underlies the ordinary. Once a person is introduced to the mythic dimensions of reality, she can discern it herself. This occurs with Rory’s sister, Bridget.</td>
<td>The series has nationalistic implications due to the elevation of historic New York City figures to the positions of gods. The series also includes implications over relations between Native American, colonists and immigrants and their use of land.</td>
<td>Munsee Indian spirits and European gods must find a way to cohabitate in Manhattan and unite despite fearing each other. The series implies forgiveness for past aggressions is the key to future peace.</td>
<td>The gods need to be remembered by the mortals and in turn, the gods protect the people who fall within their realm or job of godhood. If a god does not complete his duty he may perish.</td>
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| Time and Place | Fantasy and Reality | Ideological implications | Mingling gods and mythic systems | Protagonists’ interactions with mythic figures |

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Table 17 continued

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<tr>
<th><strong>Going Bovine</strong> by Libba Bray</th>
<th>Set in Southern and the Western United States, the novel features a road trip that is timed by Cameron’s deteriorating health, but also presents the potential that the protagonist never left his hometown in Texas.</th>
<th>While not fantastical, readers are meant to question what is real and whether Cameron ever went on his road trip or met the reality-bending characters.</th>
<th>The novel explores what it is to be a teenager and what it means to have lived and the experience of dying. The Norse god Balder’s re-presented form as a yard gnome and his discussions with the teenage boy Gonzo, help Gonzo to come to terms with his dwarfism and his over-protective mother.</th>
<th>Both angels, invented by the author, and the traditional Norse god Balder are included or re-presented. The story considers belief in a number of mythic systems and never commits to one, but does imply that there is life after death.</th>
<th>The mythic figures befriend Cameron and help guide him in his experience. Cameron also attempts to help and understand Balder, who is restricted by his gnome-body. There is an underlying romantic tension between Cameron and the angel, Dulcie.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guardian of the Dead</strong> by Karen Healey</td>
<td>While most people only see one reality, some have “double vision” and after being awakened can see the way the myths they believe are present in the world. There is also a mythic realm in the mists, where time operates more slowly.</td>
<td>Myth and fantasy exist within reality, but few can see it. In the cases of those who can see the way myth shapes the world, they are influenced by the stories that they believe in and see their effects upon the world.</td>
<td>There are feminist implications. Also, Kevin’s asexuality presents a broad understanding of human sexuality. Romantic love and Ellie’s body image are also explored.</td>
<td>The gods of different cultures may all be believed in and may influence the way each individual perceives and understands the world.</td>
<td>The gods and creatures of myth use people for their own purposes, sometimes to the people’s detriment. The mythic figures may form romantic attachments to the mortal characters.</td>
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<td>Halo series by Alexandra Adornetto (<em>Halo</em>)</td>
<td>While the celestial realms of Heaven, Limbo and Hell are described and celestial time is mentioned, the novel is completely set in present-day in Venus Cove.</td>
<td>A Judeo-Christian worldview is assumed.</td>
<td>Since Bethany is new to the human realm, she is positioned as an outsider to critique society in terms of its violence, use of technology, etc. The novel includes implications about the nature of heterosexual romantic love and about doing good deeds within a person’s community.</td>
<td>Only a Judeo-Christian perspective is included. The novel is more explicit of mentioning issues of faith, God and traditional views of angels than other novels that include angelic mythic figures.</td>
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<td>Heroes of Olympus series by Rick Riordan (<em>The Lost Hero</em>)</td>
<td>While set in a realistic world, there are areas where demigods can go that normal mortals cannot. Mythic realms are mapped onto the North American continent. Time proceeds chronologically.</td>
<td>Greek and Roman Mythic realms overlap with North America. Ordinary mortals do not see it due to a “mist” that prevents them from noticing the aspects of myth that would otherwise be visible in the real world.</td>
<td>There are nationalistic and environmental significance as well as explorations of the implications of the American recession of the late 2000s. The series is also racially expansive, presenting the idea that mortal characters from varied backgrounds may be related to a Greek or Roman god.</td>
<td>The gods are absentee parents to the protagonists. At times, some gods and other mythic figures may be antagonistic to the mortal characters, in other cases they may expect the demigods to act as their heroes.</td>
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<td><strong>Hush, Hush series by Becca Fitzpatrick (Hush, Hush, Crescendo)</strong></td>
<td>Although, predominantly set in present-day Maine, the series also includes scenes set in historical Europe to open each novel and to provide context for some of the relationships and tensions.</td>
<td>Nora experiences traumatic events and then sees the evidence that they occurred disappears, making her question what is real.</td>
<td>The series provides escapism or lends support for liking a “dangerous bad boy” figure. It explores the experience of heterosexual romantic love and the tensions and jealousies associated with it.</td>
<td>Only Angels from a Judeo-Christian understanding of the world are incorporated into a largely secular understanding of the world. The angels may borrow human bodies or may interact with mortals romantically. Romantic interest in mortals is a reason some angels fall to Earth.</td>
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<td><strong>Iris, Messenger by Sarah Deming</strong></td>
<td>This middle grade novel is set predominantly in present-day Pennsylvania. When one of the gods retells one of their stories, the setting is arguably Ancient Greece or the primordial world.</td>
<td>The mythic figures and magic are blended into the realistic world, possibly allowing the reader to see the ordinary as extraordinary.</td>
<td>There are implications about class and promoting vegetarianism. The American educational system is presented as being stifling to Iris’s creativity. The novel includes implications about femininity, beauty and race.</td>
<td>Only Greek gods are included and they only tell stories of themselves or Greek heroes and mythic figures. The gods share their stories in their own words to give advice. Mortals like Iris are descendants of the gods.</td>
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<td>Kane Chronicles by Rick Riordan <em>(The Red Pyramid)</em></td>
<td>While set in Present-day America, England and Egypt, the series also explores the duat, or the mythic realm/spirit world.</td>
<td>The focus of the series is on magic and how familiar objects may contain magic, making the ordinary seem extraordinary.</td>
<td>The gods of different cultures are meant to be kept separate. The series focuses on the figures of Egyptian mythology, but the Greek gods from Riordan’s Percy Jackson series are alluded to.</td>
<td>The gods are dangerous spirits, some of whom are helpful and may be friends, others of whom may be enemies.</td>
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<td>The Need series by Carrie Jones <em>(Need, Captivate, Entice)</em></td>
<td>Set in present-day Maine, the human and were-animal teenage characters are shocked to learn that the Norse mythic place of Valhalla exists. After several failed attempts, Zara eventually finds her way across a rainbow bridge to Valhalla, but is uncertain of how it is a part of her own familiar world.</td>
<td>Zara describes that she learned the world was really flat when she discovers that mythical creatures like pixies, were-animals and Valkyries exist <em>(2010a, p. 19)</em>. She has trouble believing Valhalla exists despite her experience with other mythic creatures.</td>
<td>The series explores the nature of good and evil, of love and how, despite her efforts to be completely good, Zara’s experience is much more complicated. Issues of status and bigotry are addressed as Zara realizes her initial negative stance towards pixies is unfair after she is turned into one herself.</td>
<td>While the series initially presents a secular worldview, the characters are surprised by the existence of Norse mythic figures. No other mythic systems are presented.</td>
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When Zara begs the Valkyrie to allow Nick to stay with her, the Valkyrie considers Zara to be weak. Zara then attempts to find a way to save Nick from having a role in the Norse mythic system. The Norse mythic figures only allow access to Valhalla to the dead or to non-humans. Continued
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<td><strong>The New Policeman trilogy (The New Policeman, The Last of the High Kings, The White Horse Trick)</strong></td>
<td>Characters may pass into the fairy realms because instead of walls there are “membranes” between the realms (p. 144). There are many worlds and time operates differently in each one.</td>
<td>Characters assume that the fairies and ancient Celtic gods are old superstitions, but their relationships to them are so old they cannot be lost.</td>
<td>The series explores the importance of maintaining traditions and a love for music. There are a few subtle criticisms of Ireland joining the European Union, as well as messages about environmental conservation and about humanity’s negative impact on the Irish landscape.</td>
<td>While only Irish mythic figures are included, there is a criticism of how some Catholic priests battled against the traditional Irish beliefs. Some mythic figures position themselves as gods, but other characters may not give them that status. When the fairies travel to the mortal realm, they disguise themselves as normal humans.</td>
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<td><strong>The Night Tourist duology by Katherine Marsh (The Night Tourist, The Twilight Prisoner)</strong></td>
<td>Set in New York City, the ghosts and mythic figures are restricted to the island and may only appear in the evening. During the day they wait in the city’s underground. Time proceeds chronologically.</td>
<td>The realms are kept separate and only Jack can see the ghosts that walk among the living at night. The ghosts cannot influence the world of the mortals in any way except through occult objects, like an Ouija board.</td>
<td>New York City Historic figures and the city’s history are emphasized. The historic figures are represented as ghosts and authority figures within the underworld.</td>
<td>While historic figures from New York City’s past are presented as spirits, the Underworld and its creatures follow the traditional Greek structure of the underworld. Many of the mythic figures are a threat to Jack and, in turn, the mortals who enter the underworld can see the ghosts scare some of the ghosts and mythic figures. Other ghosts are helpful or become Jack’s friends.</td>
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<td>Oh My Gods. duology by Tera Lynn Childs (<em>Oh My Gods</em>, <em>Goddess Boot Camp</em>)</td>
<td>Set predominantly on the imaginary Island of Serfopoula, the place is a mythic space where magic may occur. The gods’ may appear anywhere on Earth. Time proceeds chronologically.</td>
<td>While in theory present anywhere, magic and the gods are only included on the Greek Island of Serfopoula. The continuing existence of the Greek gods and their descendants is kept secret and the island is the only place where these characters are free to reveal their powers.</td>
<td>There are feminist implications and exploration of high school popularity hierarchies. Through Phoebe’s boyfriend, Griffin, the nature of what it means to be a hero is explored. The young characters are also taught responsibility and control. People of any race or culture may be descendents of the Greek gods.</td>
<td>Only the Greek mythic system is included. The Greek gods test their descendants to see if they can control their powers.</td>
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<td>Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan (<em>The Lightning Thief</em>, <em>The Sea of Monsters</em>, <em>The Titan’s Curse</em>, <em>The Battle of the Labyrinth</em>, <em>The Last Olympian</em>)</td>
<td>While set in a realistic world, mythic realms are mapped onto the United States of America. There are specific places where time operates differently.</td>
<td>Most mortals do not see the mythic world due to a “mist” that prevents them from seeing the aspects of myth that would otherwise be visible in the real world. Percy also directly addresses the reader to state that his experiences are real (2005, p. 1).</td>
<td>The series includes environmental and nationalistic implications about the United States. The series also provides empowerment for young characters with ADHD and dyslexia and explores the nature of being a hero.</td>
<td>People from any racial or ethnic backgrounds could be demigods. Only the Greek gods and creatures are included. Questions concerning the Judeo-Christian god are separated out as “metaphysical” (2005, p. 67). Gods are absentee parents to their children and many of the demigods seek a stronger sense of family. The gods are romantically interested in adult humans who excel in that god or goddess’s domain of worship.</td>
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<td>Temping Fate by Esther Friesner</td>
<td>This young adult novel is set in present-day Connecticut. The story implies that time and place can be manipulated.</td>
<td>When human characters discover the gods exist, they usually assume they are insane. The creatures of myth exist in the world, hiding their true nature, making the ordinary seem extraordinary.</td>
<td>There are some feminist implications. The novel also explores the tension and powerlessness of being a new employee at her first job, as well as the responsibility that comes with power.</td>
<td>Although Greek mythic figures and heroes are predominantly explored, a Norse mythic figure is also included and a Hawaiian deity is mentioned.</td>
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<td>Thief Eyes by Janni Lee Simner</td>
<td>Power of myth is bound by land. Time operates differently in the mythic realms.</td>
<td>The human characters initially doubt the existence of myth and assume they are insane when they witness mythic activities.</td>
<td>There are some feminist implications. Much of the story deals with overcoming the loss of a parent. Issues of sacrifice and identity are also explored.</td>
<td>While focused on Norse mythology and its influence upon Iceland, there is only a little exploration of the extension of Norse myths to other parts of the world.</td>
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<td>Why I Let My Hair Grow Out trilogy by Maryrose Wood (Why I Let My Hair Grow Out, How I Found the Perfect Dress, What I Wore to Save the World)</td>
<td>While predominantly set in Ireland and Connecticut, the faery realms are easily accessed and are under the threat of being blended together with the realistic world. Morgan also travels to the time of “long ago.”</td>
<td>The blending together of the mythic realm and the realistic world is a major threat that must be avoided within the story.</td>
<td>The series explores femininity, the experience of a long distance relationship and romantic love.</td>
<td>Irish Lore and American legends are explored, expanding the realm of myth. Also many other fantasy creatures are included, such as unicorns.</td>
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