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# ROLE OF MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

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EDITORS

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# **Role of Multilingualism in Higher Education Research**

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**Ink n Ivory Publishing House**

DAC Aves, G1, Maple Block, Narashiman Nagar, Polichalur, Chennai -75  
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## Archetypal Analysis and Post-Modern Mythmaking in Selected Works of Rick Riordan

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### Abstract

This research explores how Rick Riordan's *The Trials of Apollo* series reinterprets classical Greek mythology through the frameworks of Joseph Campbell's monomyth and Richard Kearney's postmodern mythmaking. While Riordan retains archetypal structures of the hero's journey, his narratives simultaneously subvert traditional heroic models by presenting flawed, humorous, and morally complex protagonists. Through themes of identity, inclusivity, disability representation, and moral ambiguity, Riordan reconstructs myth for contemporary young adult audiences. This study examines how Riordan blends ancient archetypes with modern sensibilities, reshaping mythic traditions to represent evolving cultural concerns about heroism, justice, and ethical responsibility.

Keywords: Rick Riordan, monomyth, archetype, postmodern mythmaking, Joseph Campbell, Richard Kearney, contemporary retellings, Greek mythology, *Trials of Apollo*

### Introduction

Myths have historically served as foundational narratives that shape cultural identity, collective memory, and moral imagination. Originating from the Greek *mythos*, meaning "story", myth functions not merely as entertainment but as a symbolic system through which societies explain origins, human behaviour, and universal truths. As Spenser Lewis states, "A Myth is an account of the deeds of a God or supernatural being...the sacred history of a divine being or a supernatural group of beings" (Lewis 11). Greek mythology formed through influences from Minoan, Mycenaean, and wider Indo-European traditions laid the groundwork for Western literary tradition, shaping epic narratives from Hesiod's *Theogony* to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Contemporary literature has witnessed a resurgence of mythological retellings, with writers revisiting ancient narratives to address present-day concerns. Works by Natalie Haynes, Pat Barker, Claire Heywood, and Stephen Fry have reimagined mythic events by foregrounding neglected voices, especially those of women and marginal figures. Within this cultural wave, Rick Riordan stands out for his ability to adapt Greco-Roman, Norse, and Egyptian mythologies for young adult readers. His novels blend humour, fantasy, and fast-paced adventure with deeper themes of trauma, identity, and belonging.

This article analyses *The Trials of Apollo* (2016–2020) through the dual frameworks of Campbell’s monomyth and Kearney’s postmodern mythmaking, exploring how Riordan’s contemporary mythopoeia reshapes archetypal patterns to address modern values of inclusivity, emotional complexity, and moral responsibility.

## **Literature Review**

### **Myth and Its Cultural Function**

Myths traditionally function as cultural blueprints, shaping concepts of justice, morality, and heroism. Scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss argue that myths operate as structures of meaning that reveal underlying patterns of human thought. Campbell extends this structuralism by positing the “monomyth”, a universal narrative pattern observable across global mythic traditions. For Campbell, the hero’s journey is both a spiritual and psychological process through which individuals confront trials, transcend limitations, and return transformed.

Greek myths have shaped Western literary imagination for centuries. Hesiod’s *Theogony* provides the genealogical foundation of the gods, while Homer’s epics explore heroism, fate, and moral choice. Later authors such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus infused myths with psychological complexity and ethical ambiguity. Modern writers continue this evolution by interrogating the power structures and ideologies embedded within the myths.

### **Contemporary Mythological Retellings**

Modern retellings often foreground marginalised perspectives. Works like Costanza Casati’s *Clytemnestra*, Natalie Haynes’s *Stone Blind*, Barker’s *The Women of Troy*, and Heywood’s *The Shadow of Perseus* reframe ancient narratives through feminist, political, or psychological lenses. Stephen Fry’s *Trilogy-Mythos*, *Heroes*, and *Troy*-repackages classical stories with wit and modern clarity while maintaining fidelity to source materials.

Riordan's contributions differ in that they aim to make myth accessible to younger audiences. By blending contemporary humour with ancient myth, Riordan creates narratives that are simultaneously educational and transformative. His protagonists-often diagnosed with ADHD or dyslexia-represent neurodiverse identities, reflecting his stated intention to create heroes modelled after his own son. Thus, myth becomes a medium for representing inclusivity and challenging normative heroic ideals.

### **Selected Texts: The Trials of Apollo**

This study focuses on Riordan's *The Trials of Apollo* series: *The Hidden Oracle* (2016), *The Dark Prophecy* (2017), *The Burning Maze* (2018), *The Tyrant's Tomb* (2019), and *The Tower of Nero* (2020). The series follows the god Apollo, transformed into a mortal teenager named Lester Papadopoulos as punishment for past arrogance. Assigned to serve Meg McCaffrey-a twelve-year-old demigod-Apollo must confront his past mistakes, rebuild fractured relationships, and redefine his understanding of humanity.

Unlike traditional depictions of gods as omnipotent and infallible, Riordan presents Apollo as flawed, insecure, and deeply human. His journey becomes one of humility, accountability, and moral growth rather than conquest. This inversion of deity-to-hero archetypes forms a significant departure from the traditional hero's journey while still invoking its structural elements.

### **Methodology**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, analysing Riordan's novels as primary texts. The study uses:

Joseph Campbell's monomyth from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as a structural framework to examine how Riordan adopts and modifies archetypal stages such as the Call to Adventure, Road of Trials, Atonement, and Return.

Richard Kearney's theory of postmodern mythmaking, especially ideas from *The Wake of Imagination* and *On Stories*, to understand how Riordan destabilises traditional mythic binaries (God/human, hero/monster, good/evil) and reconstitutes myth for contemporary readers.

The analysis focuses on narrative structure, characterisation, thematic development, and ideological shifts in Riordan's mythopoesis.

## **Archetypal Structure and the Monomyth**

Riordan's narratives retain recognisable elements of Campbell's monomyth. Apollo's fall from Olympus functions as the *Call to Adventure*, forcing him into the mortal world where he must regain his powers. His encounters with monsters, trials, and moral dilemmas constitute the *Road of Trials*. His eventual acceptance of responsibility and embrace of humility perform the *Atonement* stage, culminating in a symbolic *Return* as a changed being.

However, Riordan intentionally disrupts the traditional monomyth. Apollo is *not* a young, aspiring hero but a disgraced god. His journey is less about glory and more about accountability. Meg McCaffrey subverts the "supernatural aid" archetype by functioning instead as Apollo's mentor, protector, and moral compass. This inversion of roles destabilises normative heroic hierarchies.

## **Postmodern Mythmaking: Subversion and Inclusivity**

Kearney defines postmodern mythmaking as the reimagining of traditional narratives to reflect contemporary ethical and cultural concerns. Riordan's work exemplifies this through:

- Humanisation of divinity: Apollo's vulnerabilities challenge the idea of divine perfection.
- Fluid moral identities: Villains often possess sympathetic backstories; heroes make morally ambiguous choices.
- Representation of neurodiversity: Disabilities such as ADHD are framed as strengths rather than shortcomings.
- Diverse identities: Characters embody varied racial, linguistic, and sexual identities, reflecting present-day inclusivity.

By reimagining myth in this manner, Riordan democratises the heroic archetype, suggesting that heroism emerges not from birth or divine right but from ethical action and emotional growth.

## **Evolution of Myth for Contemporary Audiences**

Riordan's retellings engage directly with evolving cultural discourses on identity, justice, and resilience. The novels address themes such as:

- trauma and healing

- mentorship and chosen family
- ecological destruction
- abuse of power
- moral responsibility

These themes resonate with young adult readers navigating complex social realities. Through humour, accessibility, and emotional depth, Riordan reinvigorates mythic traditions for a new generation.

## **Conclusion**

Positioned at the intersection of literature, culture, and identity, this research illustrates how Rick Riordan revitalises Greek mythology through the simultaneous use of archetypal continuity and postmodern reinvention. *The Trials of Apollo* demonstrates that myths remain dynamic cultural artifacts capable of reflecting changing societal values. By subverting traditional heroic models and emphasising inclusivity, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility, Riordan transforms myth into a contemporary tool for exploring identity and justice.

His retellings reveal that modern mythmaking does not merely preserve the past—it reconstructs it to address the psychological, social, and moral concerns of the present. In doing so, Riordan invites readers to critically engage with myth while recognising its enduring power to shape both individual and collective imagination.

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