

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

The Ancient Myths  
as Medicine for the Hardships  
of Life in Children's  
and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by  
Katarzyna Marciniak



# OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak



*Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (University of Warsaw, Poland)  
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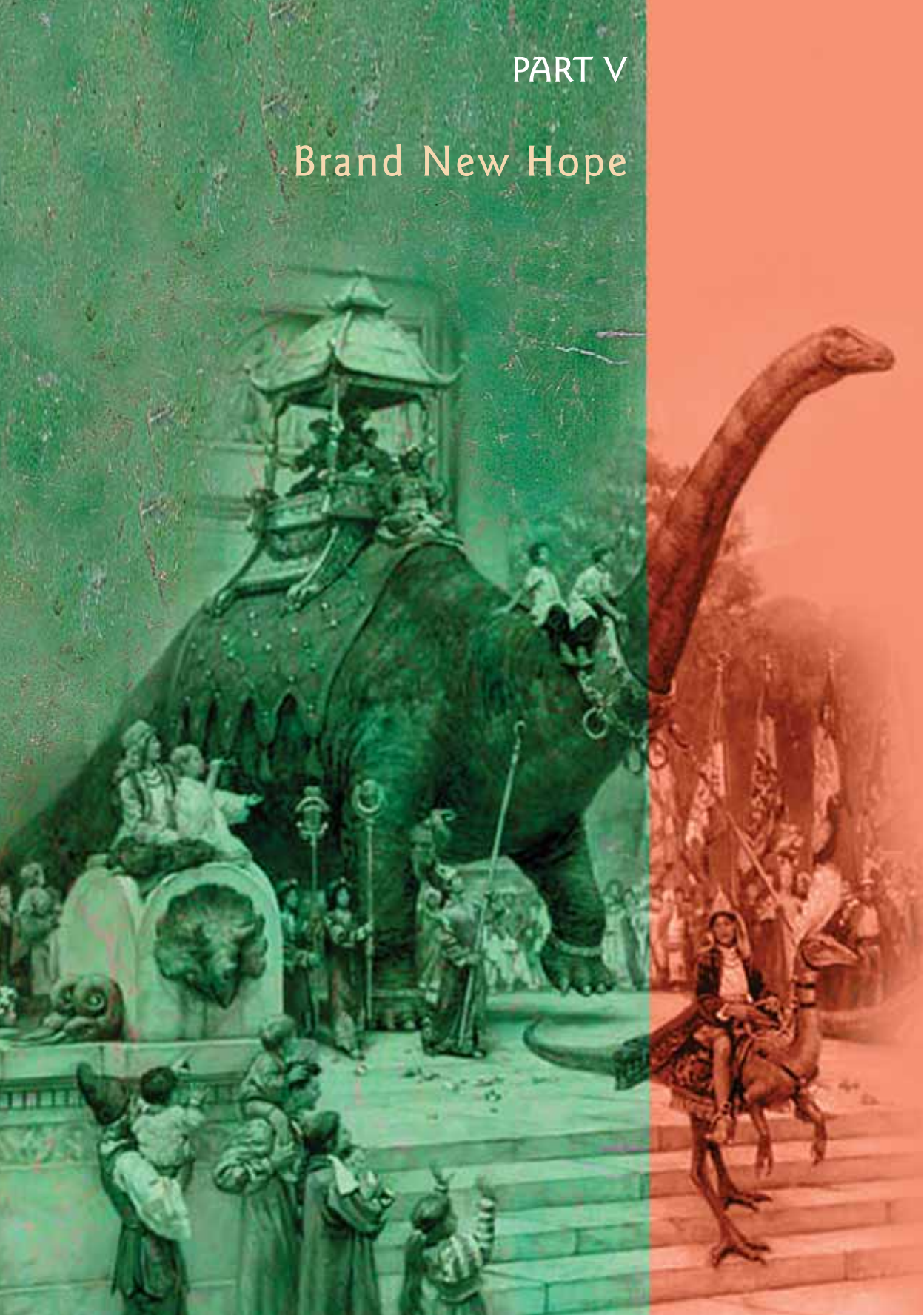
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PART V

## Brand New Hope



## PERCY JACKSON AND ISRAELI FAN FICTION: A CASE STUDY

Adaptations and rewriting of existing works have been around as long as the works themselves have existed; in the words of Lev Grossman:

When Virgil wrote *The Aeneid*, he didn't invent Aeneas; Aeneas was a minor character in Homer's *Odyssey* whose unauthorized further adventures Virgil decided to chronicle.<sup>1</sup>

While scholars and authors themselves are divided as to what exactly constitutes fan fiction,<sup>2</sup> and whether all adaptive works can be included in the group, it is clear that the Internet has given new shape and life to a specific type of such reinterpretation in the form of modern fan fiction.

One of the most popular genres for fan fiction is fantasy, as amateur authors reinvent, rewrite, and recast events and characters of their favourite novels. Series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005–2008) have given rise to a vast and ever growing number of fan fictions. Most interesting for our purposes is another example, that of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books (2005–2009), and their subsequent film versions (since 2010). These works were enormously popular in Israel, and in this paper

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Grossman, "The Boy Who Lived Forever", *Time*, 7 July 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081784,00.html> (accessed 5 March 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See Amanda Potter, "Atalanta Just Married: A Case Study in Greek Mythology-Based Fan Fiction", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 10, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2017, 131; Ika Willis, "The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work", *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016): *The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work*, ed. Ika Willis, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0807>; Tony Keen, "Are Fan Fiction and Mythology Really the Same?", *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016): *The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work*, ed. Ika Willis, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0689>.

I investigate how and why young Israeli fan-fiction writers have used the *Percy Jackson* series as inspiration for their own writing, examining what issues they explore, and how this interpretation of Greek mythology enables them to explore their own contemporary Israeli society.

Since fan fiction is continually evolving, with new works being added, adapted, and disappearing from cyberspace at a dizzying rate, any work on this topic must, of necessity, be a work in progress. Nevertheless, even with this caveat, some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the body of fan fiction in a particular place and time, as it reflects events, situations, and norms of the society from which the fiction emerges.

## **I. The Study of Fan Fiction and Its Importance: An Overview**

### **I.1. Fan Fiction as Reflection of Society**

As Amanda Potter points out, fan fiction "is perhaps the most 'popular' type of popular fiction, as it is written by the people for the people, rather than being written by a professional writer for profit".<sup>3</sup> As a subsection of popular fiction, fan fiction may be examined within wider popular culture since it exposes prevalent, entrenched, and often unquestioned social values and ideas more accurately than other self-conscious or highbrow works. As David Plotz writes, "[f]anfic writers assert control over a pop culture designed to be passively consumed [...]. Fan fiction puts the pop back in popular culture".<sup>4</sup>

The study of popular culture, examined from the perspective of critical theory, has come to be regarded as a significant and enlightening area of academic research. Such research has progressed a long way from the elitist attitudes that once regarded it as a tainted and substandard form of culture,<sup>5</sup> and it is recognized that such investigation, with its focus on the non-elitist mainstream, enables us to examine society and the trends and underlying assumptions of the members of that society. Research into juvenile fan fiction

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<sup>3</sup> Potter, "*Atalanta Just Married*".

<sup>4</sup> David Plotz, "Luke Skywalker Is Gay? Fan Fiction Is America's Literature of Obsession", *Slate*, 14 April 2000, [http://www.slate.com/articles/briefing/articles/2000/04/luke\\_skywalker\\_is\\_gay.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/briefing/articles/2000/04/luke_skywalker_is_gay.html) (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Ashley J. Barner, *The Case for Fanfiction: Exploring the Pleasures and Practices of a Maligned Craft*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017.

is particularly valuable, since as the product of the youth themselves, who determine the content for themselves,<sup>6</sup> it reflects their own personal thoughts and concerns. In the words of Rebecca Moore:

Opinions on whether to laud or lament teenagers' involvement in fanfic are as divided as Captain Jack Sparrow and genteel restraint. Yet sweeping value judgements have little merit; fanfiction is literature's teenager and is thus as contradictory and equivocal as any sampling of students. Unground in the mills of mass media and political correctness, fanfiction is raw, real, unsanitized, and un-"spun." It is naïve and jaded, stumbling and soaring, snide and sappy, ebullient and brooding. It shocks and repels, or offers Avalon. Above all, it offers an honest glimpse into the psyches of its thousands of writers.<sup>7</sup>

An examination of this genre is therefore able to provide insights into the issues and concerns faced by the young authors.

## 1.2. What, Who, Why?

So what exactly is fan fiction, as considered by this paper? One definition, from [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com), is:

A piece of fiction within a fandom utilizing characters and situations from a pre-existing work including (but not limited to) books, television programs, films, and comic strips. Typically separated into het, slash, and general genres. Often used to play out AU scenarios and/or various romantic pairings not found in the original work. Distributed via mailing lists, blogs, and zines. Heavily archived online.<sup>8</sup>

Sheenagh Pugh similarly defines it as "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings

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<sup>6</sup> On the self-determination of content by youthful fan-fiction writers in another context, see Jennifer Duggan, "Revising Hegemonic Masculinity: Homosexuality, Masculinity, and Youth-Authoring Harry Potter Fanfiction", *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 55.2 (2017), 38–45.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca C. Moore, "All Shapes of Hunger: Teenagers and Fanfiction", *Voice of Youth Advocates* 28.1 (2005), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Mistaki, "Fanfiction", *Urban Dictionary*, 7 August 2016, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fanfiction> (accessed 25 July 2019).

and plots generated by another writer or writers".<sup>9</sup> Such writing, due to its being built on an existing "canon" of works, whether books, television shows, movies, or other media, is by its very definition intertextual. In fact it is, in many cases, metatextual, playing not only with the original works themselves, but also with audiences/readers' knowledge and understanding of these texts. The fan-fiction writers and readers are themselves well aware of this; Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse talk of "fandom's constant awareness that every reading is provisional and that every characterization yields one variation among a nearly countless number of others".<sup>10</sup>

This also transforms the various writers into something much bigger – namely, communities. To quote Hellekson and Busse again:

This notion intersects with the intertextuality of fannish discourse, with the ultimate erasure of a single author as it combines to create a shared space, fandom, that we might also refer to as a community. The appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits shared authorship, and enjoins a sense of community [...]. We want to emphasize fandom's communal spirit, what fandom itself often refers to as its collective "hive mind."<sup>11</sup>

So who are the members of this community? Anecdotal evidence claims that most fan-fiction writers are females, predominantly teenagers, but this seems far from the whole or even accurate picture, not least because many fan-fiction writers do not reveal, or actively conceal, their gender and age.<sup>12</sup> As Jolie Fontenot says of *Twilight* fan fiction:

There is no such thing as "the average Twilight fanfiction writer." I've seen ages from teenagers to senior citizens. College students, stay-at-home

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<sup>9</sup> Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*, Bridgend: Seren, 2005, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, Jefferson, NC: McFarlane, 2006, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, 6, 8.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Maria Rossdal, "All of the Greek and Roman Classics. Antikerezeption in *Fanfiction*", *thersites* 1 (2015): *Caesar's Salad: Antikerezeption im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Christine Walde and Christian Stoffel, 53: "Lange Zeit hielt sich hartnäckig das Klischee, die Fans seien vornehmlich weibliche heterosexuelle Teenies und/oder frustrierte Hausfrauen. Während es stimmt, dass ein Großteil der Fans Frauen sind, weisen Alter und sexuelle Orientierung eine breite Streuung auf. Studien auf diesem Gebiet sind schwierig, da viele Fans befürchten, sich in irgendeiner Form zu 'outen' (insbesondere, wenn sie *slash* verfassen oder lesen)".

moms, husbands, lawyers, medical professionals – I've seen stories written by people who claimed to hold all of those roles.<sup>13</sup>

Many writers do start as teens, but also continue writing well beyond that age, with the result that fan fiction and their interaction within the fandom community play a large part in their adolescence. One aspect of this is the development of writing and analytical skills, which make the writing of fan fiction so valuable, and its study so vital for academics and educators. As Henry Jenkins observes:

Through online discussions of fan writing, the teen writers develop a vocabulary for talking about writing and they learn strategies for rewriting and improving their own work. When they talk about the books themselves, the teens make comparisons with other literary works or draw connections with philosophical and theological traditions; they debate gender stereotyping in the female characters; they cite interviews with the writer or read critiques of the works; they use analytic concepts they probably wouldn't encounter until they reached the advanced undergraduate classroom.<sup>14</sup>

Even more important, however, is the development of the social aspects that often accompany the writing of fan fiction. One author explains:

"I've been in fandom since early 2005, when I was getting ready to turn 12," says Kelli Joyce. "For me, starting so young, fanfic became my English teacher, my sex-ed class, my favorite hobby and the source of some of my dearest friends. It also provided me with a crash course in social justice and how to respect and celebrate diversity, both of characters and fic writers."<sup>15</sup>

Fan-fiction writers, then, can come from a much wider range than was originally realized, and the world of fan fiction provides reflection of society as a whole. As a grassroots phenomenon, largely unaffected by constraints such as publisher demands, marketability, or even acceptability by mainstream culture, it is indeed possible that the world of fan fiction can provide a more direct mirror than many other works that are limited by such considerations. These

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<sup>13</sup> Jolie Fontenot, "Twilight's True Believers", in Anne Jamison, ed., *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World*, Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2013, 188.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write", *MIT Technology Review*, 6 February 2004, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/402471/why-heather-can-write/> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Grossman, "The Boy Who Lived Forever".

authors write for no other agenda than their own enjoyment and that of others. Grossman stresses:

Fan fiction is what literature might look like if it were reinvented from scratch after a nuclear apocalypse by a band of brilliant pop-culture junkies trapped in a sealed bunker. They don't do it for money. That's not what it's about. The writers write it and put it up online just for the satisfaction. They're fans, but they're not silent, couchbound consumers of media. The culture talks to them, and they talk back to the culture in its own language.<sup>16</sup>

What then attracts young people to the books, to the extent of attempting to write their own fan fiction? Jennifer McGee outlines the identification with the characters and the importance of parasocial relationships.<sup>17</sup> The term refers to one-sided, emotionally tinged relationships developed with fictional media characters or real celebrities. Both children and adults form bonds of this kind with favourite characters from books, television, movies, games, and other media, but such relationships are particularly important for children, whose media has traditionally been character-centred.<sup>18</sup>

Parasocial relationships allow identification with the character in question, and fan fiction takes this to a higher level. An extreme form of this identification accounts for the prevalence of "hurt/comfort stories", in which one character is in some kind of physical or emotional pain, and is empathetically comforted by another. As McGee puts it:

Whether the preferred character is being hurt or feeling for another person being hurt, he or she is being driven by the plot to express vulnerability, fear, compassion, tenderness, trust – all things that humanize a character and create identification between the fan and the character [...]. Hurt/comfort, angst and torture stories have large followings of fans who understand

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer McGee, "'In the End It's All Made Up': The Ethics of Fanfiction and Real Person Fiction", in Phyllis M. Japp, Mark Meister, and Debra K. Japp, eds., *Communication Ethics, Media, and Popular Culture*, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005, 161–180.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra L. Calvert and Melissa N. Richards, "Children's Parasocial Relationships with Media Characters", in Amy B. Jordan and Daniel Romer, eds., *Media and the Well-Being of Children and Adolescents*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 187–200. See also Kaitlin L. Brunick, Marisa M. Putnam, Lauren E. McGarry, Melissa N. Richards, and Sandra L. Calvert, "Children's Future Parasocial Relationships with Media Characters: The Age of Intelligent Characters", *Journal of Children and Media* 10.2 (2016), 181–190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.1127839>.

perfectly well that they are using pain as a plot device to recreate a character in a way that encourages identification and dialogue.<sup>19</sup>

Fan-fiction writers therefore engage in an emotional relationship with their characters. Despite the fact that they are the creation of someone else, the parasocial relationship that epitomizes fan fiction ultimately develops into a feeling of ownership, although this is often subconscious. Writers often see themselves as guardians of the characters, reflecting the close bond that they feel with them, and they talk of characters having needs or behaving in a way that is independent of their original intentions when beginning to write. In McGee's words, talking of adult or slash fiction, "ethical justifications [...] often rest on the feeling that the characters are real, with wants and desires that the fanfiction writer has an ethical duty to respond to".<sup>20</sup> The writing of fan fiction thus becomes a tool for exploration, and the emotional bond created with the character provides an outlet for the writer's own emotions and thoughts.

In the case of the young writer, this bond is even more important, as Moore points out:

Source material can also offer teenagers a much needed connection to their characters. The teen years are frequently times of self-focus, when it is difficult to step back and see through someone else's eyes. Deep familiarity and friendship with beloved characters can help teens achieve the empathy necessary to take that vital step.<sup>21</sup>

The role of feedback in the form of beta readers is also important. Jenkins points out that "teen and adult fans talk openly about their life experiences, offering each other advice on more than just issues of plot or characterization. Having a set of shared characters creates a common ground that enables these conversations to occur in a more collaborative fashion".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> McGee, "'In the End It's All Made Up'", 167.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 172.

<sup>21</sup> Moore, "All Shapes of Hunger: Teenagers and Fanfiction", 16.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write".

## 2. *Percy Jackson* and Fan Fiction

One of the most popular kinds of fan fiction for younger writers is that based on Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books, in itself a slightly unusual case, in that the source texts themselves draw on – albeit with a twist – an existing body of work, namely, the classical myths. In a sense, the books are a kind of fan fiction themselves by Riordan himself, as he adapted the body of classical myth, resituating the Greek gods in New York, as a result of their following the centre of Western civilization to America. According to this conceit, Olympus is anchored at the top of the Empire State Building, becoming hidden as the building's 600th floor. The gods themselves continued to produce offspring by forming relationships with mortals, and these offspring are demigods or heroes.

The brains of these heroes are, however, "hard-wired for ancient Greek", and they therefore have trouble reading English or doing well in ordinary school. It is easy to understand the appeal of these books for young people who struggle in class. Indeed, they were written for Riordan's son who suffers from dyslexia and ADHD, as the author explicitly explains.<sup>23</sup> The works have much more widespread appeal, however, at least partly due to Riordan's comedy and, even more, his ability to judge what his readers will find funny. According to one reviewer, the "slangy, casual style is a hallmark of the *Percy Jackson* books, which often read like a faithful transcription of teen uptalk". This is despite the fact that "at the level of language, Riordan's books make J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series seem as if it were written by Samuel Johnson".<sup>24</sup>

One result of this language and style is that "unlike the *Harry Potter* books, which, notoriously, have been embraced by adult readers as well as juvenile ones, the *Percy Jackson* books seem positively contrived to repel adult readers, so thoroughgoing is their affectation of teen goofiness".<sup>25</sup> Moreover, these juvenile followers were often non-readers before they discovered *Percy Jackson*, a fact of which Riordan is proud:

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<sup>23</sup> See Rick Riordan's (a teacher at the time) remark: "My son was struggling with the same issues at school as Percy, and I wanted to make up a story which would show ADHD and dyslexia as being not all bad"; cited in Christopher Middleton, "Family Book Club: Percy Jackson, a Hero with Dyslexia?", *The Telegraph*, 5 February 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/book-club/71155592/Family-Book-Club-Percy-Jackson-a-hero-with-dyslexia.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Mead, "The *Percy Jackson* Problem", *The New Yorker*, 22 October 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/percy-jackson-problem> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

"The best emails I get are from teachers and parents saying my books have turned non-reading kids into readers," says Riordan, who lives in Texas. "That's exactly what happened with my own son. Before Percy, he never read books. Now he's 15, and wants to be a writer!"<sup>26</sup>

From the point of view of classicists, another distinct bonus of the books is their success in introducing and attracting young readers to classical sources:

Undoubtedly, Riordan has single-handedly sparked an enthusiasm among young readers for Greek mythology, and if kids are dressing up for Halloween as Apollo or Poseidon instead of Iron Man or a generic zombie, so much the better. My son and his peers know the tales of the Greek gods far better than I do, and if some of that is due to reading books such as Mary Pope Osborne's wonderfully ungimmicky *Tales from the Odyssey*, or from having *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* in the read-aloud rotation from an early age, a good measure of that familiarity has also come via Riordan's retellings.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the series' popularity, *Percy Jackson* has become one of the most prevalent subjects for fan fiction, with these writings taking third place in the popularity stakes on fanfiction.net.<sup>28</sup> It is, albeit, a rather distant third with 76,200 stories, less than a third of those featuring *Twilight* (220,000) and not even one-tenth of those featuring *Harry Potter* (809,000).<sup>29</sup> For the purposes of young adult popular culture, however, it is a very useful set of writings, due to the age of readers and writers, which is reflected in the subject matter of the stories. Fan fictions are categorized according to content level, with the following ratings:

- K: Intended for general audience five years and older. Content should be free of any coarse language, violence, and adult themes.
- K+: Suitable for more mature children, nine years and older, with minor action violence without serious injury. May contain mild coarse language. Should not contain any adult themes.

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Middleton, "Family Book Club: Percy Jackson, a Hero with Dyslexia?".

<sup>27</sup> Mead, "The Percy Jackson Problem".

<sup>28</sup> See "Percy Jackson and the Olympians", FanFiction, <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Percy-Jackson-and-the-Olympians/> (accessed 5 August 2019).

<sup>29</sup> See "Books", FanFiction, <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

- T: Suitable for teens, thirteen years and older, with some violence, minor coarse language, and minor suggestive adult themes.
- M: Not suitable for children or teens below the age of sixteen, with non-explicit suggestive adult themes, references to some violence, or coarse language. Fiction M can contain adult language, themes, and suggestions.

Other sites, including [percyjacksonfanfiction.com](http://percyjacksonfanfiction.com), use rating systems based on that of the Motion Picture Association:

- G: General Audiences;
- PG: Parental Guidance Suggested;
- PG-13: Parents Strongly Cautioned;
- R: Restricted;
- NC-17: No one seventeen or under admitted.

When looking at the fan fictions of the three most popular works on fanfiction.net, it is striking that, while almost one-fifth (19.8%) of the *Harry Potter* stories and over one-third (36.7%) of *Twilight* narratives are rated M, only 7% of *Percy Jackson* fan fictions are rated in this way, with 41% being K or K+ and 52% being T. Similarly, of the 1,400 stories listed on [percyjacksonfanfiction.com](http://percyjacksonfanfiction.com), only 152 are R or NC-17, with the remainder being G (160), PG (380) or PG-13 (708). Such classifications reflect the age of the authors/readers, which is rather younger than the fans of *Twilight* and without the considerable number of adult fans of *Harry Potter*. This means that the case of *Percy Jackson* is a valuable tool with which to examine the attraction of young people to the texts, and to examine how they use these works based on classical myth to explore their own issues and ideas.

What, then, are the central topics on which *Percy Jackson* fan fictions focus? Some conclusions can be extrapolated through examining the tags which identify and classify the stories. These figures are not entirely without confusion; stories may have multiple tags, and there are a large number that simply use the "general" label, both in conjunction with and independently from other tags. Labels and terminology also differ from site to site, complicating the issue somewhat. Nevertheless, there is broad overlap, and the tags do provide overall statistics as to how the writers are conceiving of their writing, so that there is benefit in considering such classifications.

Of the 71,000 stories on fanfiction.net, the vast majority (31,759) are tagged as romance. The next biggest category is simply "general" (19,741), while adventure (15,611) and humour (15,054) are the next most popular. The

list continues, in descending order: hurt/comfort (8,895), friendship (8,445), drama (6,439), family (5,511), angst (4,900), fantasy (2,959), tragedy (2,413), and mystery (1,325). With less than 1,000, in descending order, are parody, suspense, supernatural, poetry, horror, sci-fi, crime, and spiritual, which each have between 962 and 130 tags, while a small handful are labelled “Western”. On [percyjacksonfanfiction.com](http://percyjacksonfanfiction.com), the picture is similar, although not identical. Here the top place goes to adventure (711 stories), followed by action (606), and then romance (569). Comedy, drama, and tragedy follow with 293, 242, and, 140 respectively, while the remainder, in descending order, are tagged drabble (130), mystery (119), fantasy (74), war (71), thriller (58), biography (40), horror (37), autobiography (36), sci-fi (34), and crime and religious concluding the list with 10 apiece.

Despite the differing terminology, and the slight variations, some overall trends are clear. Most popular themes for *Percy Jackson* fan fiction are action/adventure and romance. Another large proportion are classified as either teen or general, which, bearing in mind the younger audience for these books, can probably be approximately paralleled. In keeping with the nature of the books, comedy/humour features high on the list, while, paradoxically, although somewhat typically for teens, the tags tragedy/hurt and comfort/angst feature prominently as well. On both lists, approximately one-tenth of stories are tagged as fantasy. Clearly then, the fan fictions very much parallel the original works themselves, in that the *Percy Jackson* series are fantasy and adventure books, packed with humour, with teenage protagonists and readers. Through the composition of fan fiction in the *Percy Jackson* fandom, these young authors primarily explore relationships and themes such as conflict, challenge, and potency, as played out against the background of the mythological, adventurous, fantastical world of Riordan’s demigods.

### 3. Fantasy in Israel

Before examining the Israeli fan fiction based on *Percy Jackson*, it is necessary to consider the wider background of this writing in the country. Fan fiction started rather later in Israel than in many countries, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was limited scope because of the language barrier – Israel is the only country in the world in which Hebrew is spoken and used as a first language, so that, until Hebrew translations of books such as *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* were published, there was no possibility of enough readers to enable a fandom

to emerge in that language. This is particularly true of juvenile fiction, whose consumers are rarely able to read in another language, such as English.

Secondly, fantasy, which dominates fan fiction, was in general for a long time regarded as peripheral and frivolous in Israel, a distraction from the solemn mission of creating new, serious works of literature; it was very rare indeed in original Hebrew literature and relatively unusual even in translation. According to a study by Danielle Gurevitch, Elana Gomel, and Rani Graff, whereas Jewish writing in the diaspora often tended towards “the fantastic, the mystical, and the magical”, from the outset Israeli literature was “stubbornly realistic”.<sup>30</sup> Hagar Yanai stated this in 2002, in an article in *Haaretz*:

Faeries do not dance underneath our swaying palm trees, there are no fire-breathing dragons in the cave of Machpelah, and Harry Potter doesn't live in Kfar Saba. But why? Why couldn't Harry Potter have been written in Israel? Why is local fantasy literature so weak, so that it almost seems that a book like that couldn't be published in the state of the Jews?<sup>31</sup>

Where non-realistic fiction did occur, it was generally science fiction rather than fantasy literature that enjoyed popularity.<sup>32</sup> Fantasy remained, therefore, for many years, of secondary importance in Israel. Over the past two decades, however, things have changed and fantastical works by writers such as Orly Castel-Bloom and Gail Hareven have begun to appear.<sup>33</sup> The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, founded in order “to promote and augment the fields of Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel”, has been in existence for more than twenty years now, publishing, between 2000 and 2009, a magazine called *המימד העשירי* [Hameimad haasiri; The Tenth Dimension] and maintaining an active

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<sup>30</sup> Danielle Gurevitch, Elana Gomel, and Rani Graff, eds., *With Both Feet on the Clouds: Fantasy in Israeli Literature*, Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013. See also Lisa Maurice, “Greek Mythology in Israeli Children's Fiction”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 309–332.

<sup>31</sup> Hagar Yanai, מחפשים את אורי פוטר [Mehapsim et Uri Potter; Looking for Uri Potter], *Haaretz*, 1 January 2002 (updated 16 August 2011), <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.761169> (accessed 25 July 2019). Translations of all citations in this chapter are my own.

<sup>32</sup> Ibal Sagiv, “Science Fiction in Israel: Abstract of an MA Thesis Written at Tel-Aviv University”, Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, [http://english.sf-f.org.il/article\\_sagiv1.htm](http://english.sf-f.org.il/article_sagiv1.htm) (accessed 22 September 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Orly Castel-Bloom, המינה ליה [Ha-Minah Lizah; The Mina Lisa], Jerusalem: Keter, 1995; Gail Hareven, הדרך לגן עדן [Haderech I'gan Eden; The Way to Paradise], Jerusalem: Keter, 1999.

website.<sup>34</sup> Several annual conventions are also held, the largest being the Icon Festival, which has taken place annually for more than twenty years.<sup>35</sup> At this convention the Geffen and Einat Awards<sup>36</sup> are presented for both original Hebrew and translated works of fantasy and science fiction.

The very existence of these awards attests to the existence of a genre that was previously barely known in Israel. In the wake of globally successful fantasy literature, such as *Harry Potter* and its successors, which were as big hits in Israel as in the rest of the world, the twenty-first century has seen a larger number of fantasy and science-fiction books by authors such as Hagar Yanai,<sup>37</sup> Shimon Adaf,<sup>38</sup> Ofir Touché Gafla,<sup>39</sup> Guy Hasson,<sup>40</sup> Nir Yaniv,<sup>41</sup> and Vered Tochtermann.<sup>42</sup> Since 2002 an Israeli science-fiction and fantasy magazine, חלומות באספמיה [Chalomot be'aspamia; Dreams in Aspamia], has also been published.

<sup>34</sup> "Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel", Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, <http://english.sf-f.org.il/> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. Hebrew webpage: כנסים ופסטיבלים [K'hasim v'festivalim; Conferences and Festivals], <https://www.sf-f.org.il/conventions-and-festivals>; English webpage: "Society Activities", <https://www.sf-f.org.il/en/society-activities> (both accessed 23 June 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Named for the late Amos Geffen, one of the first editors and translators of science fiction in Israel, and Einat Peleg, a journalist, critic and science-fiction and fantasy fan, who died in 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Hagar Yanai, הליויתן מבבל [Ha-livyatan mi-Bavel; The Leviathan of Babylon], Jerusalem: Keter, 2006; המים שבין העולמות [Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot; The Water between the Worlds], Jerusalem: Keter, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Shimon Adaf, הלב הקבור [Ha-lev ha-kavur; The Buried Heart], Tel Aviv: Ahuzat Bayit, 2006; פנים צורחי תמה [Panim tseruve hamah; Sunburnt Faces], Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008 (translated by Margalit Rodgers and Anthony Berris as *Sunburnt Faces*, Hornsea: PS Publishing, 2013); כפור [Kefor; Frost], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2010; מוקס נוקס [Mox Nox], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2011; ערים של מטה [Arim shel matah; Undercities], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Ofir Touché Gafla, עולם הסוף [Olam hasof; The World of the End], Jerusalem: Keter, 2004; הקטרקט בעיני הרוח [Hakataract b'einei haruach; The Cataract in the Mind's Eye], Jerusalem: Keter, 2005; מאחורי הערפל [Meiachorei haarafel; Behind the Fog], Jerusalem: Keter, 2007; ביום שהמוזיקה מתה [B'yom shehamuzika meita; The Day the Music Died], Jerusalem: Keter, 2010; עשתנות [Ashtanot; The Book of Disorder], Jerusalem: Keter, 2013; האורחים [Haorchim; The Guests], Jerusalem: Keter, 2016; רשימות מארץ הכביש [Reshimot meeretz hakvish; Lists from the Land of the Road], Jerusalem: Keter, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Guy Hasson, הצד האפל [Hatzad ha'afel; Hatchling], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2003; המשחק – מציאות [Metziut – Hamischak; Life – The Game], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Nir Yaniv, כתוב כשד משחת [Ktov ke'shed mi'shachat; One Hell of a Writer], Tel Aviv: Odyssey Press, 2006; ימי תל אביב האחרונים [Y'mei Tel Aviv haacheronim; The Tel Aviv Dossier], Tel Aviv: Odyssey Press, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Vered Tochtermann, לפעמים זה אחרת [L'famim ze acheret; Sometimes It's Different], Tel Aviv: Opus Press, 2002.

## 4. Israeli Fan Fiction and *Percy Jackson*

Amongst this new wave of enthusiasm for fantasy literature, the *Percy Jackson* books have enjoyed remarkable success, bringing Greek mythology to Hebrew children's literature in spectacular fashion. Translated into Hebrew by Yael Achmon and appearing from 2008 onwards, these books were, according to Rani Graff of Graff Books which published the novels, enormously popular with Israeli youth.<sup>43</sup> Over 100,000 copies have been sold in Israel since the second half of 2008, making them some of the most successful juvenile Hebrew books ever sold.<sup>44</sup> The subsequent movies were also released in Israel, and although they were criticized, as they were in other countries, for their divergence from the books,<sup>45</sup> the films undoubtedly widened the series' appeal.

As a result of this success, *Percy Jackson* fan fiction has therefore appeared in Israel in considerable quantity. On the Hportal website (hportal.co.il), there were 164 stories in the *Percy Jackson* and *Heroes of Olympus* fandoms, as of 24 April 2017. Of these, 73 are G rated, 40 are PG, 45 PG13, and only 4 – R (2 are unspecified). Regarding genre, romance is again the most popular category, with 53 stories using this tag, followed by adventure with 30, fantasy with 29, and humour/comedy with 20. The other stories are labelled fluff – a subcategory of romance (13), angst (12), suspense (8), drama (6), sci-fi (4), grief (3), pain/loss (1), and horror (1), with a further 29 uncategorized. On the Wattpad site,<sup>46</sup> the numbers were smaller but showed similar trends. Of the 93 stories in the *Percy Jackson/Heroes of Olympus* category, 29 were tagged merely "fan-fiction" and 10 "random", but a large proportion of these focused on romance or adventure. Of the remainder, fantasy dominated, followed by those actually

<sup>43</sup> In email correspondence, November 2013.

<sup>44</sup> According to one newspaper article, a successful book is one that sells 3,000 copies or more; 10,000 or 20,000 copies represents a major bestseller. The Hebrew books which have sold very large numbers are those that have been in print for several decades; these figures may reach 100,000 copies or more, or even up to 1.5 million in the case of a series of books with multiple volumes. See Yehuda Koren, הארי פוטר עדיין לא עבר את התנ"ך [Harry Potter adayin lo avar et haTe-nach; Harry Potter Has Not Yet Overtaken the Bible], *Ynet*, 26 June 2003, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2670518,00.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Doron Fishler, ביקורת: פרסי ג'קסון וים המפלצות [Bikoret: Percy Jackson v'yam hamifletzot; Review of Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters], *Fisheye*, 4 September 2013, [http://www.fisheye.co.il/percy\\_jackson\\_sea\\_of\\_monsters/](http://www.fisheye.co.il/percy_jackson_sea_of_monsters/) (accessed 25 July 2019); Devorah Erez, לפוברק את הארי [Lefarbek et Harry; Fabricating Harry], *Ynet*, 21 February 2010, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3849828,00.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

<sup>46</sup> See "Percyjackson", Wattpad, <https://www.wattpad.com/stories/percyjackson/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

labelled adventure and romance, and humour, following a similar pattern noticed in the other fan fictions.

Who then are the writers of these fan fictions, what attracts them to the subject matter, and how important is their writing to them? These were questions addressed both in email correspondence with the writers and in person at the annual Olamot Convention in April 2017. This conference, organized by the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy and the Israeli Tolkien Society, runs lectures, screenings, and activities, as well as providing a venue for merchandise, such as fantasy books, comics, action figures, swords, games, etc. As part of this conference, the Hportal website arranged a meeting for its members, attended by a large group of very enthusiastic youngsters. This was not a meeting specifically on the subject of fan fiction; indeed, the participants were more interested in social interaction than in discussing their writing, as reflected in the fact that most of the children arrived in groups, with friends. Nevertheless, all those who are Hportal members are actively engaged in the area of fan fiction, and it therefore provided a good opportunity to observe and discuss the subject with them.

The youth who attended the meeting were aged eight and upwards, equally divided with regard to gender. They came from a wide range of areas and encompassed a spread of academic ability, including some attendees with special needs, and of religious background, always an issue to be taken into consideration in Israel. One common factor was that the children seemed to come from relatively good socio-economic groups, classified roughly as middle class; this was a necessary prerequisite since they would have needed money to buy tickets for the event and to spend on purchases from the stalls at the Convention. Overwhelmingly, what united this group of young people, however, was their passion regarding their preferred fandom. In addition to the general Hportal session, there was a *Percy Jackson* special activity; those attending this meeting were very excited. Many of them wore Camp Half-Blood orange t-shirts or some kind of costume, and could not wait to enter the lecture hall, cheering loudly when the organizer announced that this was a special *Percy* meeting.

This passion for the subject matter also shines through from the correspondence with the fan-fiction writers. Although we have at present only communicated with a relatively small number of such authors, the unity of responses reflects that their feelings are typical. Of the eight writers who have to date answered our questionnaire, all are aged between twelve and eighteen, and all but one are female. The majority have social interaction with other fan-fiction authors, usually within Israel, but in three cases with people abroad via the

Internet. Without exception, they stress that writing fan fiction is very important to them, describing it with phrases such as “an inseparable part of my life”.<sup>47</sup> All agree that fan fiction has a measure of popularity in Israel, in the sense that those involved are passionate about it, but that this popularity is restricted to the fans of the books.

With regard to initial inspirations for writing fan fictions, these come from a range of sources: history lessons in school; individual imagination; books, including the *Percy Jackson* series; and other fan fictions. With regard to the reasons for the attraction to writing works of this genre, love of the books, and, in particular, the characters, was the major pull; one girl explained that Percy Jackson is her hero, and that it was because of him that she started to read. Other writers cited curiosity as to what happens to the characters after the stories and a desire to “make them live again”, a feeling that stems from the disappointment experienced when the end of the books was reached. Several of the authors used the word “world” when talking of their writing experiences, either in terms of “creating new worlds”, or in the sense of being “in another world” when writing, both of which reflect the all-consuming nature of the activity, and the feeling of power and satisfaction that results from an act of creation. When the creation is then shared with others, a sense of self-worth and confidence is engendered, as noted by one writer who explained: “I like to know that people are reading my stories and like them”.

These young writers also talk of their attraction to and love of classical mythology. Although one declared that there was nothing specifically about mythology that pushed her to write this fiction (*Percy Jackson* to her was “simply a great adventure book”), all the others cited the attraction of Greek myth. One made the connection between myth and fantasy, explaining: “I love everything related to magic and the supernatural”, while others were fascinated by the Greek gods, particularly their anthropomorphic aspect, and by Greek myth in general, saying that the subject really interested them, that “Greek mythology in particular is a huge treasure of ideas. Heroes, villains, places and monsters”, and that, “Greek myth is really cool”. This author added: “I often spend hours surfing it on the Internet, and go from god to monster to god...”; another enthused: “I find Greek mythology (which I’ve learned a lot about through reading Rick Riordan) really interesting, and maybe a bit complicated, which makes it more interesting for me. I love to read mythology stories and imagine them

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<sup>47</sup> This quote, and those that follow, are taken from questionnaires sent to the writers. I quote them in English translation.

really happening". These youth showed awareness of the role that the classical world has played within Western civilization and literary tradition. One writer, who said that he had not read *Percy Jackson*, felt that "Greek myth contains the root of fiction throughout history, which is the basis of modern literature". Another singled out the Greek civilization more widely, stating: "It fascinated me how the Greeks coped in the past [...]. The Greek people themselves fascinated me, both their culture and their customs".

## 5. Conclusions

If we compare fan fiction based on Greek mythology in general, and *Percy Jackson* in particular, in Israel and the rest of the world, it is clear that in many ways Israeli fan fictions fit into the pattern of those worldwide. The subjects to which the young writers devote themselves are the same in the parts of the globe we have studied in this paper – romance, adventure, and fantasy are the three major topics with which these youth concern themselves. Israel is in many ways a very different society from that of Europe or the United States, with strong Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern elements intertwined with Western cultural influences. Similarly, Israeli youth will face significantly different experiences as they approach adulthood, due to the compulsory national service. The sad fact that life in Israel means that children will have been exposed to war, with their fathers, siblings, and friends actively serving in the army, and to bombings and terror attacks, also leads to children having perhaps a wider exposure to emotional distress than in many other countries. Such a situation has indeed been cited as reason for the popularity of fantasy in Israel, in that it is a form of escapism.<sup>48</sup> That being the case, it might have been expected that Israeli youth fan fiction would focus on issues that reflect this trauma and that themes such as war might occur more frequently than in other countries. It is clear, however, that this is not so, and that these young writers are preoccupied with the same questions as their peers abroad.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in a society in which technology plays a central role, these youngsters are very at home with technology. Yet this particular group

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<sup>48</sup> Andre Tobin, "Israeli Geeks Turn to Sci-Fi and Fantasy to Escape a Sometimes Harsh Reality", *Times of Israel*, 29 October 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-geeks-turn-to-sci-fi-and-fantasy-to-escape-a-sometimes-harsh-reality/> (accessed 26 July 2019).

is also devoted to books, which is perhaps more unexpected in the digital age.<sup>49</sup> While such small numbers cannot allow for sweeping conclusions – there are surely large numbers of Israeli children who spend many hours a day focused on their screens – they do tally with other notable elements within Israeli society. It is not for nothing that the Jewish people are known as the People of the Book.<sup>50</sup> Even among secular Jews, books are held in esteem, and Israelis from all ethnic backgrounds participate enthusiastically in National Book Week.<sup>51</sup> This annual celebration of Hebrew literature evolved from a one-day event in Tel Aviv intended to promote book sales in 1926,<sup>52</sup> to a major cultural and national institution, lasting ten days, at which outdoor book fairs are held all over the country, and at which books are sold at a discount. Bookshops in Israel typically offer sales during this time which can last up to a month. Literary events and the award ceremony for the Sapir Prize for Literature are also held during Book Week, and there is also a heightened level of attention paid to literature in the media. The importance of the world of books and the role of the publishers within that world is highlighted by the fact that the *Percy Jackson* fan club and Facebook page in Israel is hosted by Graff Books, who actively maintain interest and promote events of relevance to their readers.<sup>53</sup> Even as recently as 2017, it seems, the written word maintained a grip on young fans that is at least as strong as the screen.

Equally striking is their enthusiasm both for creative writing and for Greek mythology. In an Israeli context, this is rather more surprising than the enthusiasm for books. As a very science-based society, there is very little emphasis placed on literature in the Israeli school curriculum and even less on creative writing.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, these young people are not only eager but even passionate about their writing. Similarly, despite the fact that, unlike in Europe or

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<sup>49</sup> From the point of view of this research, I do not differentiate between books read in traditional paper format and e-books read on electronic reading devices.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. The phrase actually originates in Islam, where it was a status granted under Islam to Christians and Jews.

<sup>51</sup> See “National Hebrew Book Week at 13.06.2019”, Go Jerusalem, 30 June 2019, <http://www.gojerusalem.com/events/2065/National-Hebrew-Book-Week/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Organized by Bracha Peli, founder of Masada Press.

<sup>53</sup> See גרף צעיר [Graff tzair; Young Graff], [https://www.facebook.com/GraffYoung/?hc\\_ref=-SEARCH&fref=nf](https://www.facebook.com/GraffYoung/?hc_ref=-SEARCH&fref=nf) (accessed 22 September 2020).

<sup>54</sup> For details of the Israeli curriculum and the emphasis on technology, see Yehoshua Mathias and Naama Sabar, “Curriculum Planning from the National to the Glocal: The Israeli Case”, in William F. Pinar, ed., *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2014 (ed. pr. 2003), 253–267, esp. 259–261.

the United States, Classics is very marginalized in Israel, where children have very little exposure to the literature, culture, and history of Ancient Greece and Rome, they actually have enormous enthusiasm for the subject and a thirst for knowledge.<sup>55</sup> This is a bright and articulate group of young people who have unbounded fascination in the ancient world in general and in classical mythology in particular. While exposure to recent movies is likely to have played its part in this attraction, strikingly, none of the writers with whom we communicated mentioned these as a source of inspiration. It seems that, against all the odds, it is Greek mythology, and Greek mythology in written form, that really appeals to Israeli youth, who find it relevant, exciting, and a source of inspiration. Whether this produces a new generation of classicists remains to be seen; but it can certainly be claimed that Greek mythology provides an attractive vehicle through which modern Israeli teens can explore the challenges and issues of their own world.

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<sup>55</sup> Maurice, "Greek Mythology in Israeli Children's Literature", 309–318.

The book is to be recommended for academics as well as graduate and post-graduate students working on the reception of Classical Antiquity and its transformations around the world.

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana  
From the editorial review

*Our Mythical Hope* is the latest collection of articles by scholars participating in an ongoing collaboration to ensure that the beauty and profundity of Classical myth remain known, and (hopefully) remain part of our modern culture. The size of this compendium, the sweep of subjects considered, the involvement of leading experts from around the world, all testify to how important and extensive this initiative has become over the last decade. The project's continued commitment to engage all ages, especially the young, and to extend its outreach beyond the Academy merely, makes it a leading model for how research retains its relevance.

Mark O'Connor, Boston College  
From the editorial review



Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" [...]. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public. [...] Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw  
From the introductory chapter

