

Female Resistance in a World of Epic Heroes and Legendary Adventures.

A feminist reading of Rick Riordan's *The Lost Hero*, inspired by Luce Irigaray's "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine."

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Abstract

Literature is an important part of the curriculum of Swedish secondary school and *The Lost Hero* by Rick Riordan is a popular novel among teenagers in Stockholm. This creates an opportunity to look closer at the novel, and to investigate the narrative's discussion of the female, and in this particular case, its depictions of the female characters. This essay will show that by reading the novel with a feminist approach, inspired by the work of Luce Irigaray, the narrative reveals cultural aspects that might work well as a ground for discussions in the classroom.

This essay considers how the narrative allows for opportunities of female resistance. Without replacing the male on the frontier of adventure, and without betraying their femininity, the female characters of the novel manage to change the power dynamic of how they are perceived. The female protagonist, Piper, works as a gatekeeper for the female resistance, and eliminates – for the cause – unbeneficial female behaviours.

A feminist approach is beneficial to the diversity that is expected in Swedish secondary school. In addition to already existing research on Riordan's work, this essay helps justify why *The Lost Hero* is a good literary alternative for the classroom.

Key words: Literature, Fantasy, *The Lost Hero*, Feminism, Resistance, English, Teaching.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Teaching Young Adult Literature	5
Fantasy	6
The Novel.....	7
Previous Scholarship	8
Feminist Theory	9
Analysis	12
Looks	12
Traits and Behaviour	17
Language	19
Relationships	21
Conclusion.....	23
Works Cited.....	25
Primary Source	25
Secondary Sources	25

Introduction

The curriculum for English education in Swedish secondary school states: "...students should meet written and spoken English of different kinds, and relate the content to their own experiences and knowledge" ("English" 1). Furthermore, the basic values of individual integrity, equality and solidarity should be mediated to the students ("Grundläggande värden" par. 2). Teachers in Sweden have a lot of freedom when it comes to choosing literature and according to Louise M. Rosenblatt, literature "enables the youth to live through – and to reflect on – much that in abstract terms would be meaningless to him" (173). Literature is not only important in order to understand different kinds of English, but to understand the world around us.

The Lost Hero (2010) by Rick Riordan is a young adult fantasy novel that was one of the most borrowed books by teenagers in the Stockholm area in 2018 (Stockholm Stad). In *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults* we learn that:

Mixed fantasy remains one of the most popular forms of literature for young people. Time travel, transformation, talking animals and toys, and magic feed our human need to experience the unknown through the joining of the real and the universes. By doing so, we, as readers, are freed from the confines of the here and now and allowed to enter the world of genuinely imaginative literature. (Gates, Steffel and Molson 103)

Postulate that the number of teenagers borrowing *The Lost Hero* in 2018 is an indication that the novel is a voluntary choice of literature among young adults. Then take into consideration the statement that fantasy is a genre that can help with the enjoyment of literature. For a future teacher this raises the question: what can young adults gain from reading *The Lost Hero*? Expanding the ways in which the novel can be used, and benefits that can be reaped, can show teachers the value of reading it in the classroom.

To show its usefulness, the novel will be analysed in the light of Luce Irigaray's essay "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine." In her essay Irigaray gives examples of how the female can challenge a phallogentric discourse, and thus create herself outside of said discourse. By applying the feminist theory that language needs to be turned and twisted, and that women need to claim their femininity in order for it not to be used against them, the analysis will reveal how females are portrayed in *The Lost Hero*. This essay will show that by not conforming to expected gender roles, female characters in Rick Riordan's *The Lost*

Hero challenge stereotypes and show resistance towards a male dominated discourse. When identified, the narrative's feminist perspective brings a different level to the novel; it thus becomes a cultural text that could be a valuable addition to the learning classroom, fulfilling the National Agency for Education's curriculum requirements for English.

Teaching Young Adult Literature

With the unlimited options available when choosing literature to use in the classroom, Swedish secondary school teachers today have a big responsibility to live up to. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt argues that the world is changing fast and the dogmatic ideas that might have been true for earlier generations are not anymore. According to Rosenblatt, not being able to live up to, or relate to, a set group of ideas might cause the young to become insecure, and this must surely be something that we do not want for the generations of our future. Literature, with its varied depictions of life and personality, can work as a tool to introduce different points of view (123). The role of the teacher, when working with literature, is to introduce their own standpoint, one which they have most likely refined throughout life and are now confident in. However, "this awareness of his own point of view and his frankness are not enough. The teacher needs to see his philosophy as only one of the possible approaches to life, from which his students should be given the opportunity to select for themselves" (Rosenblatt 124). The challenge for teachers is not only to introduce literature that the students want to read, but also to present different ideas without affecting the students' philosophical inclination.

Literature is an important part of a liberal education, according to Martha C. Nussbaum, who argues that literature can help raise good members of our society. Narrative imagination "[i]s the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself" (10-11), and using this ability when reading is something that can help with the understanding of other people. Leila Christenbury states: "Good young adult literature is, simply put, good literature" (17). Young adult literature differs from adult literature in that it might be shorter and less complex and even though young adult literature can be seen as juvenile and reserved for those who are poor readers, "[it] shares with the classics all the marks of literary excellence and, further, consistently inspires students reading response" (Christenbury 16). Christenbury also indicates that young adult literature can be a useful connection to classic literature when there are similarities between the two (18). *The Lost Hero* could very well be used as a bridge to discussing the *Iliad* in the classroom, and with that be a

potential introduction to both Greek mythology and one of the oldest pieces of literature, thus be one of the pieces of literature that helps develop the young members of our society.

In order to qualify for university studies, secondary school students need to have a passing grade in the course English 6 (Antagning). Some of the core content that the Swedish National Agency for Education wants teachers to include in English 6 are: “[h]ow structure and context are built up and how attitudes, perspectives and style are expressed in spoken and written language in various genres” and “[s]trategies for source-critical approaches when [...] reading communications from different sources” (“English” 7). By giving students the tools to analyse fictional texts, and enable them to discuss and question their findings, these skills can be taught in an active way where students learn by doing. Instead of using news texts or advertisements to acquire these skills, students can read different kinds of literature – which is also in the core content of English 6. It can also be beneficial for teachers as literature can work as a foundation for discussions of attitudes and perspectives.

Fantasy

In the introduction to *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Gates, Steffel and Molson introduce fairy tales as “the direct ancestors of today’s literary fantasy” (4). Placing the ancestor in a feminist framework they state that even though it is common with female protagonists in fairy tales they are not free from sexism, as these females often are passive and not able to decide their own destiny (26). Looking at the novel trilogies *His Dark Materials* and *The Hunger Games*, a version of this can be seen in both female protagonists. The protagonists, Lyra and Katniss, are young girls who like adventure and getting their hands dirty. They leave their homes and are expected to save the day, but to do so they cannot know what they are destined to do. In order to save the world Lyra needs to sacrifice her love by her own choice, and without her knowledge Katniss is used as a tool to give the rebellion of her world more power. None of the protagonists are passive, but they are ultimately used as pieces in a game of someone more powerful, they are not necessarily in charge of their own destiny. This also shows that a female protagonist does not equal a feminist narrative.

Going back to fairy tales, according to Linda T. Parsons they “establish appropriate desire as well as appropriate behaviour [and] young girls appropriate the position and subjectivities of the heroine” (136). Some of the goals of the Swedish National Agency for Education is that secondary school students will be able to use their knowledge to reflect on their own behaviour, and to have an analytical and critical approach to new information

(“Grundläggande Värden” par. 35). With the choice of literature available to teachers, it is important to include different depictions of females, and males, and to help students question what they are reading. Fantasy novels with seemingly strong but simultaneously submissive women could be one option, as long as the portrayal is discussed. In whatever way women are portrayed, fantasy is popular among young adults, according to both Gates, Steffel and Molson, and the Stockholm Library statistics from 2018 (Stockholm Stad), and should not be excluded from the school curriculum as a tool for learning.

Great insight into the genre of fantasy can be found in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, and on the subject of language in fantasy literature Greer Gilman states: “Any fiction – but above all a work of fantasy – is a world made of words” (134). In a world where anything and everything is possible, a reality such as the one in Gerd Brantenberg’s *Egalia’s Daughters*¹ is as true as the one in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. With that said, I believe that a world where the male and female are not simple opposites, but rather complex characters that do not live in opposition to each other and who can find their way to equality, should be possible to create. In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, James and Mendlesohn introduce four different categories for the entering of a fantasy world. In *The Lost Hero* the fantastic world is an “intrusion, [it] breaks into the primary world” (2). With the logic that words in fantasy can create anything, and that *The Lost Hero* introduces a fantastic intrusion, the possibilities of empowered females that include features of both reality and fantasy should be endless. The popularity of the novel, and the effect depictions of different personalities has the potential of having, increases the importance of investigating how the narrative in *The Lost Hero* is used to present females.

The Novel

The Lost Hero is the first novel in a series of seven, called *Heroes of Olympus*. In the novel, Riordan combines Greek and Roman mythology with a classic hero theme, with a narrative that follows the lives of a group of teenagers. The lost hero is a boy named Jason, and accompanied by his friends, Piper and Leo, he sets out on a quest to save Hera from Gaia, and to save the

¹ *Egalia’s daughters* is a feminist novel which tells the story of a matriarchal society. The novel uses language to point out how the language in our society is based on patriarchy, and the roles of men and women in the novel are opposite of that which we might be typically used to; the men worry about being raped and women walk around topless during summer.

world from evil. Traveling through America and parts of Canada they face several Greek gods and other mythological figures that try to stop their journey to Hera's incarceration. The novel is divided into chapters where the point of view alternates between the three main characters; two chapters named Jason, two chapters named Piper and so on. By giving a sense of power to the three main characters with their individual chapters, an exclusively male view is seemingly avoided. The female perspective, in the shape of Piper's point of view, is still written by Riordan, a male, which means that it is actually a male interpretation of the female perspective.

Jonathan Culler writes about the "literary commonplace that 'the frontier is no place for a woman'" (*On Deconstruction* 45). He refers to Dawn Lander who has looked at her own, and other women's literary depictions regarding living in the wilderness, and found that women have repeatedly found enjoyment on the frontier. The effect of the misconception regarding women's attitude is that men have been given freedom to roam the frontier without being disturbed: the frontier representing "an escape from renunciation to a paradise of male camaraderie" (*On Deconstruction* 45). In *The Lost Hero* this misconception is challenged and with that comes more freedom for the female character. Even though the main protagonist is Jason, a male, he gets a lot of help from his two friends on their quest, of which one is female – Piper.

The novel starts from Jason's point of view as he wakes up and has no memory of how he ended up in the school bus that is taking him and his friends to the Grand Canyon. It does not take long before the characters have fought off storm spirits, and after being saved they are taken to a half-blood camp – a camp for the offspring of gods and goddesses. The half-blood children live with their half-siblings and train for combat at the camp. Jason, Piper and Leo are all demigods and after hearing a prophecy about the end of the world they leave for their first ever quest on a flying metallic dragon. On their quest, they meet different gods and mythical creatures, learn a lot about themselves and try to solve the riddle of the prophecy they are following. Returning safely to the half-blood camp after fighting off the last enemy, they have grown older and wiser. The novel ends with Jason realising that he is not a Greek demigod but a Roman one, and that if he has been sent to the Greek half-blood camp, one of the Greek demigods must have been sent to the Roman equivalent.

Previous Scholarship

Most of the previous research on the works of Rick Riordan has been done on his *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Some of this work focuses on Riordan's intentions when writing the

Percy Jackson series, as well as the reception of the readers and the hero motive in the same series. Mugijatna Mugijatna, Sri Kusumo Habsari and Yunita Ariani Putri suggest that Riordan wishes to introduce the Greek mythology to the American audience. His attempt seems to be successful as they find that readers enjoy the aesthetics of Greek mythology that the novels offer, as well as the “humorous blend of Greek Mythology with American real life” (Mugijatna, Habsari and Putri 84). By using demigods, Cathrine Elizabeth Tandberg argues, Riordan creates a connection to the personal challenges that children today face. Percy Jackson has ADHD, as does Leo in *The Lost Hero*, and dyslexia and by identifying with a demigod that fights evil, children can see that it is possible to be special in a good way (Putri, see Tandberg 67). Amie A. Doughty has looked at the series of The Heroes of Olympus, of which *The Lost Hero* is the first novel, focusing on environmental issues. She looks at Gaia, the ultimate evil in the series, and concludes that she can be seen as Mother Earth who is not happy with the way she is treated.

To some extent, Mugijatna, Habsari and Putri, as well as Tandberg and Doughty, have interesting insight to Riordan’s work that can help explain why it is not only popular, but why it might be beneficial for young readers. As a complement to an accessible introduction to Greek mythology, ways of identifying with heroes even when having neurological disabilities, and adoption of a more ecological mind-set, an investigation of the females in Riordan’s work can help find out how – if – the narrative gives females possibilities of resistance and the creation of their own space within the narrative. In addition, a simplified version of the theoretical approach of this essay could be used by secondary school students to analyse discourses found in other kinds of literature and media: making this essay helpful in further reading and learning.

Feminist Theory

As mentioned in the previous section, the written word establishes norms and behaviours that the reader might interpreted as desirable, and with the reading of a young adult novel, the narrative and discourse play a significant role in the research of this essay. In her introduction to “Writing, Reading and Difference” in *Feminist literary theory*, Mary Eagleton states that there is traditionally a difference to the binary oppositions of woman and man. In this opposition, female language is labelled “as subjective, emotional or impressionistic; at its worst, as bitchy or gossip, marked by the inconsequential” (288), whereas masculine language is “authoritative, rational, appropriate for serious public platforms” (Eagleton 288), and for women to take more place they need to adapt to masculine language. Judith Butler says that “dialectical appropriation and suppression of the Other is one tactic among many, deployed

centrally but not exclusively in the service of expanding and rationalizing the masculinist domain” (19). Promoting a way of speaking which is considered masculine reinforces the suppression of women and is thus only beneficial for a masculine discourse. By conforming to a masculine way of speaking the female would only help in the expansion of the masculine, rather than promoting a feminine discourse. Challenging the norms and performing in ways that are not necessarily expected gives more space for the expression of one’s sex or gender to be free. Jonathan Culler summarises Butler’s theory of gender performativity well by writing that it is by not repeating wanted behaviours that the subject can make the “possibilities for resistance and change” (*Literary Theory* 104) available. In other words, by not conforming to the norm the subject creates new ways to identify themselves.

Another feminist who introduces ways of identifying as a female is Luce Irigaray. In her article “Luce Irigaray (1932?-)” Sarah K. Donovan presents Irigaray as a continental philosopher and French feminist whose “texts provide a comprehensive analysis and critique of the exclusion of women from the history of philosophy, psychoanalytic theory and structural linguistics” (Donovan par. 1). Irigaray studied at the Freudian School of Paris, founded by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. She was critical of both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and the publication of her dissertation, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, caused her to lose her job at the University of Vincennes. Irigaray did, however, receive recognition and she is still an active researcher (Donovan par. 4). Mimesis is a tool with which Irigaray believes women can break the existing theoretical mechanisms and thus create a new theory. She argues that “[o]ne must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (76). The female needs to “resubmit herself [...] to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, [...] to make “visible,” by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover up of a possible operation of the feminine in language” (76). In other words, Irigaray suggests that women should use the stereotypes enforced on them. By playing with these stereotypes the tools of suppression can be made visible and then challenged. Women are able to adjust the role of femininity that the male discourse has dealt them by bringing new nourishment to mimesis. Instead of giving the nourishment that is beneficial for men, women need to challenge the discourse by adding to mimesis what is beneficial for them (76 – 77). The most important aspect of mimesis is not to fall into the expectations placed on women, but rather challenge the ideas of male logic.

In the interview-like essay “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” found in her publication *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray explains both her

critique of Freud, and argues her view on the existing role of women in a phallogocentric discourse. She asks, “[h]ow can we accept the idea that woman's sexual development is governed by her lack of, and thus by her longing for, jealousy of, and demand for, the male organ?” (69). Irigaray claims that all of Freud’s thoughts on female sexuality, defined as a deficient version of the male sexuality, means the woman is always seen in relation to the man. Furthermore, the role of the mother is most expected of women, as this would silence the female’s desire for a penis, as there is a potential of carrying a son (69). One of the dangers of putting the role of motherhood on women is that they are then confined to the home (83). Despite Freud’s ideas that the male is in charge of the reproductive process, as the bearer of a penis, he is not confined to the home and is therefore free. The woman is simply a tool for the masculine and only associated as his subordinate.

Women have historically been given one option, where maintaining the phallogocentric view on femininity and whatever that may entail, has been the objective. This does not make room for real female pleasure in language, as “it is not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operations” (Irigaray 77). Even if women attempt to take on other roles than those preferred by the male dominated discourse, it will be in relation to the male. If women are to partake in mimesis, it should be used as a way of taking control of the submissive female role. By reflecting on herself and not allowing the male logic of her position prevail, she can add new aspects of herself, through mimesis, and thus try to change her position as the other. In order to change the discourse of gender, the language used about women needs to change. There is, however, a danger to every discussion regarding women if they keep adhering to the existing discourse. To speak about women automatically places them in a role of “repression, censorship [and] nonrecognition” (Irigaray 78), which is why mimesis and working from within the expected role can help in the creation of a new discourse theory that would give women prerogative. In order to give the feminine space in language everything needs to be disrupted: “there would no longer be either a right or wrong side of discourse” (Irigaray 80). By taking control of the femininity that is given to the woman, and by stretching that role, we can begin to understand what it is that places the feminine in subordination, and from that knowledge reveal new femininity and avoid the male domination of it.

Even though Irigaray is not a prominent literary critic, her thoughts on mimesis, the female in relation to the male and the possibilities to thwart this relation, has the potential to bring interesting insight to *The Lost Hero*. The female characters are part of a typically male dominated discourse in an adventure novel, and Irigaray’s discussion on the power of discourse is thus useful for the analysis done in this essay.

Analysis

One novel is not representative of our society or of female resistance as a whole, but it can help us understand what female resistance can look like. With a novel that is popular among young adults, this kind of research is extra important. Even though the novel has a male protagonist in Jason, Piper is the de facto female protagonist and the depictions of her and other female characters help Riordan's novel present opportunities for female resistance. The novel takes inspiration from Greek and Roman mythology, but this will not be commented in the analysis part of this essay. The focus is the descriptions of female characters, regardless of their "heritage", and how they demonstrate female resistance, as well as benefits the narrative can have in teaching the novel to Swedish secondary school students. As previously mentioned the novel is part of a series, and it is also linked to previous series by Riordan. This essay, however, is focusing on *The Lost Hero* alone. In the analysis, parts of the novel that are deemed appropriate for the objective of the thesis have been chosen. Different characters from the novel, as well as from different sections of the novel, have been included to ensure range and representation. The analysis is also divided into four categories that define their depictions: looks, traits and behaviour, language, and relationships.

Looks

The first depiction of Piper in the novel is through Jason's point of view and the initial narrative is that of a submissive female. According to Jason she is wearing "...faded jeans, hiking boots and a fleece snowboarding jacket [and] no makeup like she was trying not to draw attention to herself, but it didn't work. She was seriously pretty" (1). Without knowing her, Jason assumes she does not want attention simply by the way she dresses. Not only is the male gaze of the narrative the first thing to describe a female, the female – supposedly – tries to fight the male view with her appearance. The assumption here is both that women in general want attention, most likely from men, and that there are certain ways one should dress and look to merit said attention, of which the male is a gatekeeper. If Jason is accurate in his statement that Piper does not want any attention, he strips her of that right by saying that her being pretty opposes that wish. Any attempt from Piper to avoid the male gaze by the way she represents herself is diminished. In extension, he indicates that being pretty means a woman will not be able to avoid attention, and she is therefore a "[product] used and exchanged by men" (Irigaray 84). When

Jason comments on Piper's appearance he makes her fit into the female role expected from masculine discourse by evaluating her level of prettiness. The initial narrative point of view in the novel – where a female cannot take ownership of her desirability – changes and is challenged throughout the novel, starting when Piper can describe herself.

When the male is describing Piper, she is wearing clothes of her choosing, but Jason does not approve them as worthy of attention. When it is Piper's turn to describe herself, she has been transformed after being claimed by her godly parent, Aphrodite, and she is not comfortable in the new look she is given. Her possession of the narrative in this later description gives her power to express her true feelings. Her clothes turn into a beautiful dress, her hair transforms and she has makeup on her face (131). Piper "despised dresses" (131) but can still recognise that she is wearing a "beautiful white sleeveless gown" (131). The indication here is that this kind of clothing is what beauty looks like, but she does not think it is for her. Instead of having a Cinderella, fairy godmother moment, where she could love this look and the attention it warrants, Piper rejects it and makes it clear that this is not her femininity. While Piper feels unlike herself in this look, feeling like "...everyone [is] staring at her like she was a freak" (132), both Jason and Leo are astonished and Jason exclaims "Piper, you... you're a knockout" (132). This beauty, the novel seems to suggest, is meant for the male gaze, being watched and desired, which she is not comfortable with. The word "freak" strengthens the indication of resistance toward the male gaze, where female beauty is something that is up for display as something extraordinary. From the first moment she is given, Piper is commenting on the role of beauty and refuses to adhere to the male expectations. The narrative offers a tool for resistance – mimesis – and since she has no possibility to stop the makeover her attitude towards her appearance works as a critique and new nourishment to the mimicry. Rejecting the male version of female beauty is the first sign of Piper's resistance towards the expectations of male dominated discourse.

While her newfound beauty could have been a way for Piper to be admired, it does not correspond with the image she has of herself. The natural state for her does not have to do with her looks, which is why she rejects the makeover. Eventually she gets some clothes from some of her cabin mates: "The hand-me-downs weren't fancy – thank god – [...] she felt almost normal again" (181). Feeling normal also means that Piper can stand up for herself, as she does when Leo calls her unwanted names: "...don't call me 'beauty queen', or I will punch you again" (240). Leo's choice of word in his name calling is associated with the look that has come to represent extremely, almost exaggerated, beauty, and in a way he is making fun of a phallogocentric femininity which Piper does not want to be connected to. Using the term "beauty

queen” as something negative makes this female trait a bad thing, something that suggests a lower status in Piper, or any other woman, as a female. Despite her appearance she takes control and resists the notion that her femininity comes from appearance, and subordination, that is created by and for the male. The novel thus suggests that a woman is not simply a passive creature of beauty meant for men, but a strong active female who will not only go on adventures, but also punch a man if needed.

Linda T. Parsons states that in fairy tales, the good female protagonists are given beauty, feminine beauty being highly valued, while men are given strength, knowledge or courage (137). As a beauty, the female heroine does not have to do anything to be chosen by the prince other than be beautiful. In the case of Piper, Jason has already declared that she is pretty, and even though she has feelings for Jason, Piper rejects the artificial beauty that comes from Aphrodite – she wants to be chosen for more than her appearance. When it comes to male heroes, the narrative challenges Parsons’ theory when Piper describes Jason’s good looks: “[she] couldn’t help thinking how amazing he looked with his blond hair glowing in the fire light, his regal features like a Roman statue’s” (124). There is a glimpse of female desire connected to physical appearance, rather than the potential of being saved or marrying a hero. The typical features of male and female heroes are somewhat tumbled. Since Piper only thinks these thoughts to herself rather than expressing them to Jason, she does not attempt to extract power with regards to the beauty versus strength/knowledge/courage dichotomy that Parson offers. The narrative does, however, suggest that a female can be attracted to a male without feeling a need to be saved. When rejecting beauty as a tool to win Jason over, Piper also attempts to add her inner qualities into the femininity used to attract a male. Mimesis allows for adjustments to the role of a female heroine without taking away heroism from the male.

Expectations around “beauty” is one of the ways in which the male can exert power over women, and the need for agreeability from women is another. When Jason comes to camp half-blood he realizes that he has a sister, Thalia. In a picture he finds, Thalia has “... black hair – choppy like Piper’s – a black leather jacket and silver jewellery, so she looked kind of goth, but she was caught mid-laugh, and it was clear she was with her two best friends” (163). As he did with his description of Piper, he acknowledges the ways in which Thalia’s looks are not necessarily normative, and then adds something to make her fit into the role of phallogentric femininity. Instead of letting Thalia be goth – perhaps a bit scary – he adds a “but” followed by something “soft” to make her more agreeable. When he is not challenged by the female, Jason attempts to take control by applying a male notion of femininity. Irigaray suggests that “[the woman] loses herself by playing on her femininity. [The] masquerade requires an *effort* on her

part for which she is not compensated” (84). Not only is the masquerade of being a female forced upon her, but it compromises Thalia’s attempts to express herself in a certain way – to bring something new to femininity. Jason’s description of Thalia forces something upon her that she has no real benefit of; making her agreeable is only helping him relate to her. The novel thus suggests that while the man is the only one speaking, the woman cannot attain resistance and claim what is rightfully hers. In other words, the female needs to have space to present herself.

In contrast to the active and adventurous females, there are some passive ones, the most visible being Drew. In the case of Drew, Piper works as a gatekeeper for female resistance and the use of mimesis, making sure the femininity that Drew portrays does not go uncommented on and therefore does not fall into the trap of phallogocentric discourse. Drew is described as a “tall, Asian [with] dark hair in ringlets, plenty of jewellery and perfect make up. Somehow she [manages] to make jeans and an orange T-shirt look glamorous” (34). Furthermore, Piper says that she is familiar with this kind of girl and that “they [are] going to be enemies” (35). In this case it is a female describing another female, and not in a positive way. Drew represents something Piper does not like for herself, being beautiful according to the male discourse, and this causes her to be dismissive of Drew. In the same way Jason and Leo have used beauty against Piper, she now uses it against Drew, referring to her as “glamour girl” (35). The opposition to beauty for the male gaze is there, Piper represents desire to be equal to men and Drew represents acceptance as the submissive, and tension between the two builds up. With one woman commenting on the other, the novel shows that resistance comes from within the female, whether mimesis is used as a tool for change by herself or someone else. In this case the commentary from Piper is not about jealousy or being “bitchy”, but about correcting a behaviour that is not beneficial for the collective female resistance. The unsuccessful mimesis of Drew, who is falling into the role of a submissive woman, is corrected, and the novel shows that women need to help each other, perhaps teach each other. Furthermore, the narrative comments on power that is no longer in the hands of the male, but in the hands of a female that has revealed herself as someone who does not care about male approval. In other words, power cannot be attained when male approval is sought; it is the rejection of said approval that is powerful.

So far, the analysis of mimesis has been connected to females using beauty to challenge the male expectations. Mimesis can also be used to challenge the male expectations of a woman acting more masculine, and thus trying to claim power. Leo describes his half-blood sibling Nyssa:

She wore camo pants, a tank top that showed off her buff arms and a red bandana over a mop of dark hair. Except for the smiley-face Band-Aid on her chin, she looked like one of those female action heroes, like any second she was going to grab a machine gun and start mowing down evil aliens. ‘Cool,’ Leo said. ‘I always wanted a sister who could beat me up’. (74)

Leo’s instinct is to fight Nyssa, making it clear that she is not a female that he deems ‘attractive’ and agreeable but perhaps threatening. In response to this Nyssa says, “Come on, joker boy. I’ll show you around” (74) without smiling. Not only is she thwarting the idea of femininity by her attire, she also refuses to be agreeable. Her choice in clothing makes her mimesis effective, especially when she is not affected by Leo’s talk about fighting. He sees a woman who would fight him for power, and instead she contradicts this idea by being calm. She is not attempting to “change the distribution of power” (Irigaray 81), as this would leave power in its current structure and therefore still be beneficial for the male discourse. Furthermore, Nyssa stays in the half-blood camp and is not one of the females who attempts to leave. She can thus be seen as a mother figure and her look gives new nourishment to the portrayal of a homebound woman. Nyssa challenges the power dynamics and in this way the novel shows resistance to the phallogocentric discourse.

Using beauty, which is connected with the feminine that is expected by the male discourse, to benefit women is not necessarily a bad idea. The novel indicates that beauty can be powerful if used in a certain way, as seen in Jason’s description of Piper’s previously beautified look: “He’d never thought of beauty as a form of power, but that’s the way Piper had seemed – *powerful*. He liked regular Piper better – someone he could hang out with” (283). Jason is, in other words, suggesting that the female beauty created by the male discourse can be used as a powerful tool, as Irigaray suggests with mimesis, but that he prefers when it is not. Just before the final battle of their quest, the group gets a makeover from Aphrodite. Piper is dressed in a “turquoise dress [...], black leggings and black leather boots [...] and her old snowboarding jacket from her dad, which amazingly [goes] with the outfit pretty well” (435). While she might have felt uncomfortable in the beginning of the novel, this time she is not bothered and Leo calling her “the best-dressed warrior in town” (435) does not seem to faze her. Piper uses mimesis as a tool to claim the space she needs to truly be her own kind of female. By wearing a dress, she takes on the role of femininity the way masculine discourse expects, and by wearing black leather boots and a snowboarding jacket she brings new nourishment to

the depiction of a woman. The beauty that she felt uncomfortable with in the beginning, as it was structured by men, is now her own and can therefore be used in her quest for resistance.

The beginning of the narrative has a male dominated undertone, where the male protagonist has power over the commentary of female beauty and looks. There is also an aspect of the male gaze in the narrative that is problematic, as the way the females are looked at and commented on causes both discomfort and frustration. After the male protagonists' initial attempts to define beauty, the females attempt to take control of their looks. The females are given more authority as the narrative develops but the male characters continue to place the females in the phallogentric perspective, softening any edges to make the women more appealing to them. It also becomes clear that there are different kinds of beauty and that the exaggerated, in the look of the "beauty queen", is less accepted in the narrative and that a kind, non-intrusive beauty is to prefer. Women need to take back what is theirs and stop it from being used against them. By taking control of beauty and removing its exaggerated form – both in terms of Drew and her Aphrodite transformation – Piper creates a safe space for herself, where a woman can wear a beautiful dress to a fight.

Traits and Behaviour

As the narrative develops it becomes evident that Piper is quite intelligent and she is also very knowledgeable about Greek and Roman mythology. Piper's character offers new portrayals of femininity – versatile and complex – more than the male idea of a beautiful female that stays at home, and is initially mocked for it: "She made a face at him, which Leo was used to, but it didn't quite work with her new glamorous makeup. 'I *read* sometimes, okay? Just because Aphrodite claimed me doesn't mean I have to be an airhead.' 'Feisty!' Leo said" (197). Piper not being able to express her usual seriousness or annoyance, due to makeup, indicates that a "beautiful" woman does not possess these qualities in a patriarchal discourse. Instead, it becomes a joke and Leo's comment is a mockery of her attempt to validate her skills. Piper tries to thwart the notion that beauty and brains are a dichotomy, and in doing so, tries to reveal something new in her femininity. Irigaray suggests that, "[the] feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative of the subject [and] with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side" (78). This disruptive excess is something that is fluid and can be difficult for the male to fathom, as it does not come from, or fit into, the phallogentric discourse. This can be seen in Leo not accepting Piper's attempts to show her versatility – a female that is a disruptive excess to the male discourse by being intelligent and

assertive. The further the narrative goes, Piper proves to be necessary for their quest and is thus more accepted by her male peers; with that her resistance against submissive femininity grows. With her transformation, she is “working toward a modification of women’s status” (Irigaray 81). Instead of taking power from men, something Irigaray suggests simply means “resubmitting [oneself] to a phallogentric order” (84), Piper is changing the power dynamic and thus creating her own space – space for resistance. The other two protagonists are male and there is no use for Piper to try and claim their space, but instead she brings something new to femininity and thus complements the group by finding her own space in it. The novel shows that by jolting the discourse the status of women can begin to change.

With regard to the journey to find female resistance, Piper returns from her quest with the realisation that some parts of the femininity expected in a phallogentric discourse can be used for good. It is not the physical beauty that is the strength of Aphrodite, but the spreading of love. Piper has been on a quest and has experienced a male dominated world, something her rival Drew has declared not to be interested in: “*I certainly haven’t been on any quests, They’re a waste of time!*” (178). Piper challenges Drew to the position of Senior Counsellor which causes Drew to show her true, cruel, self: ““You -” Drew spluttered. ‘You ugly little witch’ I’ve been here the longest. You can’t just-”” (520). Eagleton refers to female language as emotional and bitchy (288) – which can be seen in Drew’s outburst. Piper on the other hand makes it clear why she is challenging Drew, using “masculine language [which is] rational” (Eagleton 288), and Drew decides to step down from her position as Senior Counsellor. While Drew has stayed at home, embodying the role of a submissive female, Piper has been on a quest – pushing the boundaries for females. If the male discourse suggest that women should take on a motherly role, stay at home and not be allowed on the frontier, Piper shows that coming back from the frontier can actually provide more to the role of being a “mother” and a woman. She uses masculine language to add something new to the mimesis of being a traditional woman; the argument that leaving home can improve your contributions in the home area. The novel thus provides a new form of good mothering. Piper’s resistance towards a femininity created to fit into the phallogentric discourse wins over Drew’s traditionally submissive femininity.

If Piper has found a middle ground that allows for female resistance, Thalia has gone further on the journey towards it. She has left home to be a hunter and does not seem to have any desire to come back, completely denouncing the role of the homebound female. What saves her from being a female trying to shift the male power is her feelings towards her brother Jason. Even though Thalia has never met Jason and his friends, she is confident and calm, and nothing seems to surprise her. Her calm and stern exterior changes when she hears about Jason possibly

having been in danger as a child and “the colour [drains] from Thalia’s face” (386). The thing that can make Thalia soften is her younger brother, and even though she is a hunter, someone who has decided to leave the femininity of a woman who stays at home, she still has motherly feelings. She is a hunter and a caring person at the same time, a complex character with traits that could be contradictory, similar to Piper. As she does not turn cold or unsympathetic to her family she shows nurturing tendencies, which contradicts any notion that leaving the home should stop you from being motherly – feminine. Here lies Thalia’s resistance: she cares for the male without subordinating herself to him. Instead of finding a space in male discourse, the narrative has created a female discourse, to which the man can then be invited. The novel suggests that even though it might be difficult to break free from the binary, dependent, relationship between man and woman, this can be done if the dominance is thwarted and the female is given control.

When it comes to traits and behaviour two things stand out: the role of a passive mother character versus the adventurer, as well as the dismissal of phallogentric female behaviours. Piper and Thalia have a soft spot for caring; they are nurturing but instead of being passive, staying at home, they go on to the frontier in different ways. Taking space on the frontier, something associated with male adventure, is important and desired, but in being caring they also prove that they do not have to dismiss the traditionally expected female traits of motherhood to be good adventurers. Being a mother, or nurturer, is what the phallogentric discourse wants from our female characters but they opt for a version where they can still be adventurous, and thus avoid submission. New elements to the expectations of women are added and Piper’s dismissal of Drew makes it clear that the narrative favours a discourse where females are not passive and submissive.

Language

The Lost Hero does not include a new language as those made up by, for instance, Tolkien (Gilman). It does however introduce the reader to what is referred to in the novel as *charmspeak*: an ability that makes the speaker able to convince listeners to behave in certain ways. Charmspeak is only used by women in the novel and the majority of them do not use it for good. However, on their quest, Piper uses it to fight for good and to save her friends. As Piper is the one that is victorious in the end, the narrative shows that the use of this female trait should be for good. It is even described in a positive manner when Piper speaks:

Everyone's eyes turned towards her. She had to be scared out of her mind, but she looked beautiful and confident – and it had nothing to do with the blessing of Aphrodite. She looked herself again, in day-old travelling clothes with choppy hair and no makeup. But she almost glowed with warmth in that cold throne room. (220)

In the end of the novel Piper challenges Drew and says that “Aphrodite is about love and beauty. *Being* loving. *Spreading* beauty. Good friends. Good times. Good deeds. Not just looking good” (521). Even though she herself has previously used her power to get her way, Piper's adventures have made her realise that her ability can be used for the greater good – making her an improved female. Piper is the one who calls Drew and Medea out on their charmspeak when they use it against her friends. In other words, she is a fellow charmspeaker who protects her male friends when she informs them that they are being manipulated. In revealing the purpose of the female language, when used by Drew and Medea, she works as a translator who stops charmspeak from being a tool for evil. Instead of charmspeak being something that needs to be oppressed, due to its association with the female, Piper proves its necessity in a context where it is beneficial for both man and woman. Irigaray suggests that by disrupting discourse, there should no longer be “a right side or a wrong side of [it]” (80). With charmspeak, the narrative has thus developed something truly feminine which the male cannot temper with or excerpt power of – as it is dependent on the female, while also being beneficial for the male.

While charmspeak is a positive feminine language, there are female linguistic features that are the opposite. In her article “The ‘Mean Girl’ Crisis: Problematizing Representation of Girls’ Friendship,” Marnina Gonick points out that “nastiness, viciousness, and back-stabbing have been integral to girls’ friendships throughout previous generations” (396). The concept of a mean girl is not a new phenomenon and it is merely the lack of physical outlets for aggression that cause girls to “use exclusion, rumours, name-calling, and manipulation” (396). Drew's way of speaking is that of a mean girl; she calls people sweetie, silly and hon – Piper calls it “false sympathy” (172). Since Drew is not appreciated by Piper – a gatekeeper of female resistance – this typically female behaviour is portrayed as negative. Premiered as an outlet for aggression is adventure and to fight enemies. Drew is performing a stereotypical female behaviour and Piper assists in the challenging of this role, showing that this is not the only way for a female to speak with her peers. The ways of behaving, inherited within the female community, are seen as negative while the male behaviour is seen as superior. The importance here is not necessarily the femininity of the trait, but rather the claim of power of it, and Piper is the person making sure resistance is achieved when it comes to expressions of aggression.

Piper was given her name because her grandfather said she had a strong voice when crying as a baby. The grandfather believed that Cherokee songs could solve problems and that Piper would be a great Cherokee singer (368). Piper might not sing Cherokee songs, but she is the singer of female resistance and charmspeak is her language. She saves her friends by being able to translate the charmspeak and in that she saves the men, which in a way is a contrast to the classic male hero, and in the end her power is not threatening to the men. It has already been established that Piper works as a form of gatekeeper for the female resistance, she makes sure femininity is commented on so that phallogocentric discourse is criticised. Her journey towards acceptance and recognition as herself enables the narrative to show feminist tendencies.

Relationships

The notion that the female has a constant desire for the phallus, as suggested by Freud, is something that Irigaray finds unacceptable (69). And while Piper continues to sing the praise of female resistance, it is the desire of the phallus that questions the narrative's dedication to the female resistance. Piper's father is being held captive and she has been told that he will die if she does not betray her friends. When her friends find out about it they make up a plan to save her father as well as finishing their quest alive. She cannot take on the role as a saviour entirely by herself, as that could exterminate her goal of finding her own middle ground in the expression of femininity. Helping her friends means she helps someone on the same level while saving her father might be too much of an intrusion to the phallogocentric discourse; doing the job herself would mean that she had taken all the power. Even though Piper is equal to Jason and Leo, she is not equal to her ultimate phallus figure – her father. In not being able to save her father the male expected femininity is shown. However, when the father has been physically saved, she saves his mentality by erasing his memory with a potion and sending him back to “the real world”. Instead of saving her father in the physical way she saves him from going mad, and thus finds her own way of being a saviour and a hero. By offering new options for the hero role, the narrative shows ways in which a character can be powerful without being the typical, male, hero. Tandberg argues that characters with ADHD can help readers that suffer from this neurological disability, as they can identify with the hero, and see that ADHD does not stop you from being special. Female heroes with new approaches can do the same, making the novel more inclusive.

In the novel, it is Jason who is named the hero, but the narrative does introduce other potential heroes, not only in Piper. What they do have in common is that it is females that

want to save males, the opposite of a traditional story where the prince does the saving. Annabeth is one of the demigods who saves Piper, Jason and Leo when they are attacked at the Grand Canyon. She is not really described to any greater length and is seen as a leader by her fellow campers. Annabeth is worried about her boyfriend who has gone missing and has her mind set on finding him. Even if she is drawn to the phallic male figure she is also planning on saving him, which thwarts the notion of who is supposed to save whom. The behaviour of Annabeth can be compared to Irigaray's opinion that we have to open up different aspects of the existing philosophical discourse to take back "what they have borrowed that is feminine, from the feminine, to make them 'render up' and give back what they owe the feminine" (74). In other words, we need to take back the role of the mother that has been claimed by the male as a tool of oppression. In being caring but also deciding to save her boyfriend, Annabeth is doing this. She is not content with having a submissive role of a mother, she also wants to be a hero.

To some extent, Piper and Annabeth position themselves as saviours of men. They manage not to fall into the trap of simply taking the male power, by portraying some expected feminine qualities at the same time. They are both making a lot of choices in relation to the men in their lives, while Thalia uses the man in her life not to become an extreme opposite of the expected female. As a hunter, in a group of "handmaidens of the goddess [who] roam around the country killing monsters" (168), she has denounced the possibility of a heterosexual relationship. The Hunters of Artemis are all females who have sworn off men and as a thank you from Artemis they have been given eternal life as hunters. She has left the traditional life of a woman who should be submissive and settled at home. Living with only women, hunting, she is partaking in an activity that is traditionally male, and thus tries to conquer power by stepping in to a male playground. According to Irigaray this is not beneficial as the woman would only try to use the male sphere for power, rather than changing the discourse (81). Using the male sphere only confirms it as being dominant and powerful, instead of challenging the oppressiveness of it. Thalia, however, shows her vulnerability when she meets Jason and learns about his misfortunes, and thus rejects the rather simple idea of being a woman that has taken space in a masculine world – she is more complex than that. Neither does she handle the news about her brother by crying or causing drama, but rather calmly and solution oriented. Even though she cares for her brother and wants to help him, she goes back to her hunter pack and shows Jason and the group on their way. Her hunter family – where no men are allowed – is more important. Thus, Thalia has found a "place of her 'self-affection'" (Irigaray 77), a place

where she can have an affection for the phallus that she herself has chosen – caring for her brother – but where she is not subordinated by men, as there are none.

In the relationships between men and women in the novel, there is potential to thwart the role of the hero. Piper, Annabeth and Thalia either come to the rescue of men or plan to do so, and even though their ability to save the men is not obvious, they have the intention to try. The narrative makes it clear that the women should not take the role of the man and thus leave their femininity behind, it is rather a question of finding new ways of being a hero. These new ways can include the gift of mental serenity, a princess saving a prince, or the refusal to sacrifice your life for a man – the female resistance can show itself in many different ways.

Conclusion

Using literature when teaching English can have a lot of benefits. However, choosing what kind of literature to use can be difficult, as there are not many restrictions in the Swedish secondary school curriculum. The genre of fantasy is popular among young adults, and young adult literature can work as a gateway to classic literature, but it is important to know what aspects of the literature to elevate. Riordan's *The Lost Hero* provides examples of female resistance towards a male dominated discourse, and as discussed this may well provide suitable material for learning exercises to use in the secondary school classroom.

The analysis provides evidence that the female characters find ways of creating their own space in the discourse. Being comfortable in their looks and not being beautiful for the male gaze is an important part of the female resistance. Beauty can also be powerful, and the female characters need to find ways of not claiming male power simply by using their looks, as this would not benefit the cause of resistance. The females are given more authority when they themselves decide and describe beauty, indicating that the male comments need to be silenced to allow for femininity to reveal itself.

The narrative elevates a characteristic of traditionally viewed femininity – caring. The idea of women as mothers is a trait that some of the female characters hold on to. Even if they are not staying in the home, they reveal features of motherly caring, which stops them from adopting a masculine behaviour on their journey towards resistance. Even though some feminine traits in the characters are still valued, it is not feminine beauty decided by a phallogocentric discourse that is preferred, as Parsons suggests in her article. The behaviours that

the narrative promotes are not those of a passive princess, but an active heroine that proves herself as someone to be counted on.

As Irigaray has advocated, resistance comes from within the female expressions and it is something that the female characters take charge of. Piper, the female protagonist, develops throughout the narrative and helps the novel reveal moments of resistance and opportunities for a femininity that is not decided by phallogocentric discourse. By letting the female characters find their own middle ground, keep their feminine traits that are not only for the benefit of the male discourse, and by finding new ways of being heroes, the narrative presents a feminist perspective to a potentially phallogocentric story of heroism. It can thus be concluded that the female liberation is not a matter of taking space and power from men. With the use of mimesis successful resistance can be found in that which is feminine – the femininity which men make us believe is not powerful – in combination with an unexplored frontier. Instead of renouncing the male hero role, the narrative of *The Lost Hero* creates a gap, where new kinds of heroes can be introduced. Existing discourse is challenged and new elements are added to avoid suppression of female characters.

With the intersectionality that is an immediate reality for schools in Sweden, it is important to find literature that not only speaks to the students, but that helps them develop, and understand the world around them, no matter their ethnicity, socioeconomic background or gender identification. To build on the need for varied literary approaches and knowledge that can be applied to future literary encounters, further research on this novel series would be beneficial for the aspect of inclusion. As previous research has shown, Riordan's work relates to young adults with neurological disabilities, and with the results of this essay the range of relatability has widened. Rosenblatt's argument that literature can provide different points of view is validated in this essay, and working with the different perspectives of the novel can be beneficial for secondary school teachers.

School is a place for learning practical skills, but also for learning about yourself, life around us, and for acquiring skills for continuous learning. Working with literature in a way that covers more than linguistic gains or theme discussions can be a beneficial way of reaching said learning. This essay provides results that can help with the teaching of *The Lost Hero* from a feminist perspective, and its approach can be used on other pieces of literature to help find additional moments of female resistance in an otherwise male dominated discourse.

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