

# **Formula Analysis in JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*: A Comparative Study on Fantasy Fiction**

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## Abstrak

Budaya populer sebagai bagian dari budaya masa telah mengalami pergerakan yang cepat pada awal abad ke-20. Salah satu produk budaya populer ada di bidang sastra—yang kemudian lazim disebut sastra populer—yang juga telah mengalami perkembangan pesat termasuk perkembangan genre dan formulanya. Fiksi fantasi adalah salah satu genre sastra populer yang banyak mendapatkan respon positif baik di pasar maupun diskusi-diskusi akademik. Contoh fiksi fantasi adalah *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* karya JK Rowling dan *Percy Jackson and The Olympians: The Lightning Thief* karya Rick Riordan. Tulisan ini akan menganalisis formula yang digunakan dalam kedua fiksi tersebut, meliputi persamaan dan perbedaannya, dan juga faktor-faktor yang membuat keduanya disukai pembaca. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua fiksi fantasi tersebut secara umum mempunyai formula yang sama pada penokohan, struktur narasi, dan motif tindakan. Sedangkan perbedaannya terutama terletak pada cara penulis menyajikan mitologi dan metafor di dalamnya. Formula merupakan salah satu faktor utama yang membuat suatu fiksi disukai dan mendapat respon positif di pasaran, termasuk juga konsistensi, orisinalitas, kemampuan menarik keajaiban, tempat (setting) dan gaya (style).

Kata kunci : sastra populer, fiksi fantasi, formula

## I. Introduction

Popular culture as the product of mass culture has passed through the fast development in the 20th century. The 1920s and 1930s is regarded as the significant turning point in the discussion of popular culture in line with its rapid rise. Popular culture reveals in many ways such as in the forms of cinema and radio, mass production and consumption of culture, the rise of fascism and democracy, including those of literature (Strinati, 1995:4).

Literature has been undergoing some development in its forms and genres. In popular field, people read and find special pleasure and delight in the literature and put interest in certain types of series which have highly predictable structures that guarantee the fulfilment of conventional expectations. For many people, the types make up by far the greater portion of the experience of literature (Cawelti, 1976 :1). One of the types in popular literature is fantasy. Fantasy is a type of fiction containing something impossible, contrary to the laws and nature as people know them. If a-so-called realistic fiction acts as mirror of everyday life, fantasy flaunts its deviations from reality. Fantasy writer create the unbelievable, twist the taken for granted, and turn things inside out (O'Keeffe, 2003:22).

Gates et.al (2003) wrote that fantasy literature represents readers' personal need and the universal quest for deeper realities and eternal truth. Fantasy is imaginative fiction that allows readers to explore major life mysteries without being limited by size, time, or space. This kind of literature may also content of daydreaming and reverie, the relatively harmless, short-lived kinds of fantasizing many people indulge in to help boredom or pass the time (Gates, 2003:2).

Two forms of fantasy fiction that have attracted prominent enthusiasm from public are *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*. *Harry Potter*, first published in 1997 has received a vast comments form critics, media, educators, and also religious groups. Consisting of 7 series, *Harry Potter* put itself as the UK best-selling book until 2001 and is also granted some awards. The series have already adapted to film and received warm responses. Like his counterpart, *Percy Jackson* series has also received positive responses, becoming best-selling book, and is granted some awards. This paper would scrutinize both sides of both fictions, of their first series, respectively *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, from the intrinsic sides. The analysis is on the formula and other inside aspects structuring the body of the fictions which later supporting the stories to became the readers' favourites.

## II. Harry Potter and Percy Jackson at a Glance

After *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* novel was published firstly on 30 June 1997 in London with its 500 copies, it received some various comments from critics and media. When released in the US after retitling to be *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone*, it also received warm responses. Has been translated into 67 languages, including that of Braille alphabet, the *Harry Potter* last four series set records as the fastest-selling books in history. The film has been made, and licensing of more than 400 additional *Harry Potter* products has been released ([www.wikipedia.com/harry\\_potter\\_and\\_the\\_sorcerer's\\_stone](http://www.wikipedia.com/harry_potter_and_the_sorcerer's_stone) accessed 26 April 2010).

Both *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* tells about the adventurous story of young boy in finding the truth and justice. As cited in the [http://www. bookrags.com/ notes/hp/](http://www.bookrags.com/notes/hp/), *Harry Potter* is depicted as an 11 year-old boy who lived with his grumpy uncle, aunt, and their spoiled son since *Harry's* parents, wizards, were killed by Voldemort, a wicked wizard. At his 11 birthday, he was invited to Hogwarts, a school for wizard and befriended with Hermione and Ron Weasley. One day *Harry* unintentionally heard a conversation about the Sorcerer's Stone between Professor Snape and Professor Quirrell. *Harry* and friends realize that the Sorcerer's Stone is hidden by a three-headed dog at Hogwarts and is the secret to eternal life created by Nicholas Flamel. *Harry* concludes that Snape is trying to steal the Stone and Quirrell has prepared a series of defenses for it. *Harry*, Ron, and Hermione discover that Voldemort tricked Hagrid, the *Harry* guardsman, into revealing the method by which to get past the three-headed dog, the guard animals and to the Sorcerer's Stone. He finds Quirrell in the chamber without his stutter. Quirrell admits to hosting Voldemort and trying to destroy *Harry* in the forest. When his turban is removed, *Harry* sees a double face on top of Quirrell's head, which is Voldemort, and he wants to use *Harry* to get the Stone and then kill him. *Harry* discovers the Stone in his pocket and tries to kill Voldemort and Quirrel until he blacks out.

*Percy Jackson :The Lightning Thief* also received positive responses from public even though it was not as high as *Harry Potter's*. After finishing written in 1994, *The Lightning*

*Thief* had just released on July 28, 2005 after experiencing handing-over the publisher. The book has sold over 1.2 million copies in the subsequent four years and appeared on the *New York Times* children's Best Seller list. The film of *Percy Jackson :The Lightning Thief* firstly released on February 2010.

Some critics said that *Percy Jackson* series are like the *Harry Potter's* followings. As described in [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), Percy Jackson is a twelve year-old-boy diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia, who has been removed from some schools. And like Harry's going to Hogwart, Percy also has to go to Camp Half-Blood, a training camp for demigod since he is the son of common woman and Poseidon, a god of sea and earthquake. Poseidon had broken an oath taken with Hades and Zeus after World War II of not having any more children since they were too powerful. Percy is then granted a quest to find Zeus's master bolt which Chiron believes Hades has stolen. However, Zeus, who discovered Poseidon had broken his oath of having more children, believes Poseidon had Percy steal the bolt. Percy, who has ten days before summer solstice to find the bolt, is given magic shoes by Luke, the camp head, before leaving. Percy, accompanied by Annabeth and Grover, decide to travel west to reach the entrance to the Underworld in Los Angeles. They encounter several Greek monsters, and also the war god, Ares, who tells Percy that his mother is alive. Percy confronts Hades who also believes that Percy stole the Master Bolt as well as his Helm of Darkness, an object that allows him to become a shadow. This lets him sneak up on his opponents. Percy realizes that Ares has tricked him when he discovers the bolt in his backpack. Percy then fights and defeats Ares by hurting the god's heel. Ares gives Percy the Helm of Darkness which Percy returns to Hades. Percy reaches New York City to give the master bolt to Zeus and thereafter Percy returns to camp, after knowing that his mother is alive. He meets Luke, who confesses that he stole the bolt for Kronos, who tried to destroy Zeus. He calls out a poisonous scorpion which stings and nearly kills Percy. Chiron cures him and Percy leaves to attend another school.

### III. The Formula Analysis on Harry Potter and Percy Jackson

Cawelti (1976:1) wrote that in general, a literary formula is structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works. If taking a look at many popular story types, people will find that it combines those of literary phenomenon. These popular story patterns are embodiments of archetypal story forms in terms of specific cultural materials. A formula, thus, is a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype.

The formula of the above fictions can be jotted down as follows :

#### 1. Imaginary world

One of persistent aspects of fantasy novel is to transcend to imaginary world, a world where not all human beings can get into it (Scholes, 1977: 175). In both novels, the imaginary world exists and it is separated from real life by the thin screen, untouchable layer that common people cannot enter. In Harry Potter the gate through imaginary world is wall of Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  in King Cross Railway Station, while on Percy Jackson it is in the middle of prairie. Both of them are described as usual setting as ordinary people can see, but the barriers are only clear for the heroes. As Tolkien said in O'Keeffe, (2003:29) that fantasy presents some kinds of tension between primary and secondary world, though some show mere glimpse of a secondary world lurking behind the primary one and others exist totally in a secondary world with only a hint of

normal reality. In fantasy, the heroes usually have a supernatural power as their advantages, Harry Potter with his ability as wizard and Percy Jackson with his power dealing with water as son of god of sea.

This is what Howard (2007) wrote about transformation, where the heroes disappear from a time from the face of the earth to undertake their missions. In here, the protagonists would make a transformation from youthful innocence to mature experience. They are faced with situation in which they are expected to solve the problems as adults and forget their former world before they are finished doing the task.

Gates (2003:17) mentioned that vivid setting is one of the criteria for successful fantasy fiction so that setting plays crucial role in determining the readers' likeness. The wondrous setting of *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* may lead them to be easily acceptable to the readers since they can reveal their capacity to incite wonder and attract readers' curiosity. It is in line with what Gates (2003:2) wrote that fantasy may refer to the end of the mental process of fantasizing, in which case it is a by-product of the mind's capacity to create images of objects not physically present or even possible. It may become the way of releasing from burdens of living or coping.

Imaginary world is also one of the places to incite wonders a lot. The process of inciting wonder may be through explicit statement and description as elaborated in most *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson*. In the early part of the story, Rowling described the the coming of strange owls in the yard of Harry's uncle, inciting that unusual moment was happening and the next wondrous experiences were coming until the end of the story. The other strange occasion is when Harry could interact with snake in the zoo which later leads the readers to the next surprise and wondrous adventures. It is the same with Percy Jackson who at the first time gets his power inside water. These precedences lead the stories develop and bring the surprises to readers.

## 2. Imaginary being

The discernible formula for fantasy novel is about the beings, which can be in the forms of common people or imaginary being. The beings can be divided into two characters :

### a. Protagonist characters

#### • The Fantasy hero

Since both *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* describe about the adventure of a special young boy—one is a wizard and one is demigod—who struggle for a special thing and defend the truth, the protagonist characters in both novel can be called fantasy hero. According to Howard (2007), the hero should have certain qualities : insight, courage, and endurance, and they must be inherent. Harry and Percy have this qualities as both have insight and courage to leave the security of familiarity of the known world to the unknown world as the quest demand.

Campbell (2006) describes that hero usually has the same pattern : initiation, adventure, and return. This made the fantasy to be loved by most readers. Readers love how they initiate with problems, involve in society, enduring sufferings caused by the adventure they experience, and then after the enemies are defeated, the heroes return to the society.

As the initiation, Harry and Percy have the same characteristics : coming from middle-class family, alienated from their social lives, regarded as strange in his real life (Harry had unpleasant attitudes from his uncle's family and Percy suffered from ADHD and

dyslexia and expelled from school) but received favourable names in their imaginary world and everybody knows them (Harry is well-known as the son of good wizard parent, James Potter and Percy is the son of Sally, a common woman, and Poseidon, god of sea and earthquake). Both of them do not know about their true identities and how valuable they are in their outer world. Both of them have the difficult and risky duties resulted from their ancestor (parent)'s fault: Harry should save the sorcerer's stone, and Percy should get the Zeus' bolt and helmet of darkness from the theft.

From the structured formula, according to Adi, Ida R (2008) the concept of fantasy hero is still dreamt by the most Americans since psychologically, Americans still miss the romantic hero, wilderness, and pastoral ideas such as in romantic era. They dreamt of their innocence where the agrarian is the basic life and had not been changed by the machines. The emergence of industrialization is indicated to break the romantic ideals of natural lives and dehumanized society. In fantasy, they dream of hero that can bring their fantasy through their new world, an imaginary world.

- The good mother (guide)

The good mother in fantasy is not about that of biologically, but that of the quality of the assistance to the hero and she/he has distinctly maternal character (<http://commons.wvc.edu/nhoward/215/course20%documents/FFQuest.pdf>). They usually can live in both world, real and imaginary ones and not always in the form of a female one. Harry is assisted by Hagrid, a large-sized man with gray beard, while Percy is accompanied by Groove, a satyr. Described not as really intelligent but loyal creatures, they help in introducing the new life for the hero and involved in the hero's action.

- The wise old man

The man is generally portrayed as a magician, wizard, seer, or sage, professor of special knowledge and functioned as surrogate father of the hero by telling hero what he should do and treat hero like their own child. (<http://commons.wvc.edu/nhoward/215/course20%documents/FFQuest.pdf>). In *Harry Potter*, Harry is protected by Professor Dumbledore, Head of Hogwart school, while Percy is treated by Mr. Brunner (Chiron), a centaur. When the heroes begin to make their adventures, the wise old man may accompany them, warn them of any danger, or point out the path they should go. The old man help the heroes develop into the real heroes they always have the potential to become.

## b. Antagonist characters

- The Fantasy villain

The antagonist characters usually have motives to take revenge, or pursuit of power and wealth. The antagonist character in *Harry Potter* is Voldemort, the murderer of Harry's parents, and the creature who plans to kill Harry. In *Percy Jackson*, the antagonist is Kronos, who also thieve the bolt and helmet because of the jealousy. The power and eternity become most of the motives why the villains usually do their action and they usually use the way that make disadvantages to other people.

The villains in *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* cannot work alone. They use other people's body and strength so that they can survive. Voldemort uses Quirrell, whose

body he lives in to keep him alive until he can steal the Sorcerer's Stone and achieve immortality. Kronos uses Luke to steal the objects as the revenge.

### 3. The journey

In adventure, they must face some obstacles and usually ended with the battle between the heroes and the villains, with the winning in hero's hand. In here, the heroes usually suffer from hardships, like sickness, famine, losing the beloved friends or family, and sometimes the heroes endure the dying situation (Howard, 2007: 7).

While in the return section, the heroes came to society and leading ordinary life. Harry return to his uncle's home, and Percy also return to his previous life with mother and stepfather. During their interaction with people they act as usual, acting as if nothing special happened to them.

Nancy Howard called the adventure as the journey, which has purpose as the discovery in which the heroes learn essential truth about themselves, or their society, and the nature of human existence (Howard, 2007:7).

### 4. Narration Structure

The main focus in the narration structure of fantasy is the hero and challenges he should face. Both Harry and Percy firstly do not know about their history, attending school, and at certain age are invited to "new school" in "new world", do not know anything about the new place, accompanied by the guide, meeting with the wise old man, having difficult duties, having battle with the villain, and get the winning. All of the actions have their functions and they interplay well each other. According to Colbert (2001) this structure made Harry Potter and Percy Jackson are loved by the readers. Readers had already been familiar with the structure that made them acceptable to the market.

### 5. Treasure

Sometimes the goal of the journey is a literal treasure : precious object, jewels or hidden fortune, princess, or something intangible such as the acquisition of knowledge, power, spiritual enlightenment, or inner peace (Howard, 2007: 9). In *Harry Potter*, as the title mentions the treasure is the sorcerer's stone, while in *Percy Jackson* the treasures are bolt of thunder and the helmet. However, though the treasures seem to be tangible, but they are actually means the intangible ones such as idealism to break the evil lives, knowledge that the good moral will defeat the bad, and universal peace messages.

### 6. Action motives

The action motives of both characters are caused by the parents' problems that inherited to their descendants, Harry and Percy. They must solve the problems where the parents usually are the victims of the villains who want to take revenge. The innocent hero appears for the sake of their parents to halt the villain doing their actions. The way of the heroes solving the problems and break the evil lives is still

Gates (2006) mentioned that successful fantasy incorporated the criteria : internal consistency, originality, capacity to incite wonder, and also vivid setting, and style. Internal consistency means that though the fantasy writer has authority to create anything violates the nature law, however, readers also have right to insist that what has been imagined or contrived should be explained and operate according to some law or principle, even if it is one devised by

the author (Gates, 2003: 10). Serious violations of internal consistency, whether deliberate or not, can result in narrative ambiguity. Internal consistency covers the characters, the transformation, journey, narration structure, action motives and all the elements supporting and connecting the stories intrinsically.

Insisting on originality is also inevitably justified though many new fantasies come out every year. Even though it makes writer difficult to stay in this goal, but works that are markedly original and fresh in subject matter, character setting, theme, or style still stand a good chance of attracting readers interests and attention (Gates, 2003:12-13).

*Harry Potter* is considered to be original in the characters, setting, theme, style and other supporting elements inside. Among coming-of-age-heroes, *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* are still attracting people around the world since they offer the new recipe to incite the readers' curiosity especially on the theme. *Harry Potter* first series publication itself was not more successful as those of the last fourth. Though it surprised readers at first, however readers take time to adapt to the story and receive it.

Though both fictions have the same formula, the two also have differences especially on the way the writer conveyed the stories and the way they used the metaphors. Both of them base the stories on Greek mythology. Even though *Harry Potter* series' major theme is magic and apparently does not have any Greek mythology touch, however the writer confessed that the series is totally based on Greek mythology implicitly. Rowling used symbols and metaphors in the story such as the magic stick, magic mirror, the owl, sorcerer's stone, and the use of several character's names such as Hermione, Draco Malfoy, Voldemort which basically based on Greek mythology (Colbert, 2006). Meanwhile *Percy Jackson* explicitly uses Greek metaphors, where readers can see the mythology clearly. Object such as The Bolt of darkness and helmet, or strange creatures like minotaur, satyr, centaurs, the god and goddess, the name of Percy itself, and other situations the characters experience such as the dream and senses, bring the Greek mythology in the readers's minds.

#### IV. Conclusion

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *Percy Jackson and The Olympians: The Lightning Thief* have grabbed the readers' and critics' interests which result in the large number of its selling. Though the latter has not been able to catch up the popularity of the first, the phenomenon of both fictions' success could be raised in academic discussion. As the popular products, both novel can be analysis through its formula. Though fantasy may release people from the burden of live's problems it still has the same formula. Another factors that contribute to the successful of the fantasy are consistency, originality, capacity to incite wonder, and also vivid setting and style. However, both fictions still have the difference such as the use of Greek mythology conveyed by the writers.

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