



The Ancient Roots of Children’s Fantasy Fiction: From the *Odyssey* to Artemis Fowl and The Laws of Magic

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Abstract: Critics of fantasy fiction stress that its roots lie in ancient mythology. This article offers a case study that tests the currency of this assumption for children’s fantasy. It investigates how the contemporary subgenre recycles characters and narratives from ancient tales through two series and the *Odyssey*. We demonstrate striking parallels between the series and the *Odyssey* and reveal how key features of contemporary children’s fantasy – including quest structures, the character trait of cunning intelligence, and particular patterns in father/child relationships – have their roots in and continue to follow the logic of this fundamental ancient text. The article concludes that reading contemporary children’s fantasy through its classical antecedents reveals the persistence of ancient narratives in the subgenre. Children’s fantasy fiction is not impoverished or limited by its ongoing dependence on ancient tales. Rather, the deeply adaptive sensibility of fantasy is generative of new opportunities for storytelling.

Keywords: Children’s fantasy fiction, popular fiction, *Odyssey*, ancient mythology, Artemis Fowl, Laws of Magic

1. Introduction

Critics writing about the fantasy genre consistently stress that its roots lie in the mythical stories of ancient peoples. For Richard Mathews, “as a literary genre, modern fantasy is clearly related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore” (1). Brian Attebery asserts that “modern fantasy draws on a number of traditional narrative genres” (2; see also Mendlesohn and James 7;

Armitt 13–15; Dickerson and O’Hara 16). Fora such as *Tolkien Studies*, the *Journal of Inklings Studies*, and the Mythopoeic Society consider elements of ancient narratives in contemporary fantasy fiction through the framework of popular fiction studies or genre studies. However, most critics who consider ancient Greek mythology in contemporary fantasy fiction tend to focus instead on the implications of their findings for the study of ancient myth, or propose no significance for what they uncover beyond enhancing understanding of their selected fantasy texts (Kleczkowska; Foster; Groves; Knorr; Rogers and Stevens). We employ close and comparative textual analysis to test how contemporary children’s fantasy fiction in particular recycles elements of a specific ancient Greek text – the *Odyssey* – and consider what this means for the subgenre. We find that themes of the *Odyssey* are reappropriated and adapted in the selected texts, and this provides a launch pad to argue that narrative elements inherited from this fundamental ancient text – specifically quest structures (explored through katabatic journeys and internal quests), the trait of cunning intelligence, and particular patterns in father/child relationships (especially for male protagonists) – are an inherent part of the children’s fantasy subgenre.

The scope of our work for this article is necessarily limited to allow very close examination of the breadth and variety of ways texts in the subgenre might borrow from and redeploy elements of the *Odyssey*. The immensity of charting the intertextual weave between the *Odyssey* or other ancient texts and children’s fantasy across a vast literary history led us to narrow our focus to ask if and how a given contemporary children’s fantasy novel reaches back to a text at the heart of the ancient canon. Our approach is to test how a frequently made generalisation applies to a contemporary subset of fantasy through a specific ancient text. Our findings are definitive: key features of the *Odyssey* are freely adapted by the texts we discuss, providing concrete evidence that contemporary children’s fantasy continues to effectively reappropriate characters and narratives from its classical antecedents.

We compare two contemporary (post-2000) series and the *Odyssey*, one of the fundamental mythic narratives of Western culture. Scholars routinely single out the *Odyssey* as preeminent (Dickerson and O’Hara 100; Hall). John Clute labels the *Odyssey* the “earliest external quest tale in Western literature”, and states that it “underlies much modern Genre Fantasy” (“Quests”). Mary Economou Bailey Green calls it “the archetypal quest story”. Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James contend that the *Odyssey* is “a precursor for much later fantasy fiction” (7). More specifically, Ortwin Knorr compares Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* to the *Odyssey*. The *Odyssey* is therefore an intuitive thread through which to investigate how two contemporary children’s fantasy series retain links to their classical roots.

The two children’s fantasy series we focus on are Eoin Colfer’s *Artemis Fowl* (2001–2012) and Michael Pryor’s *The Laws of Magic* (2006–2011). These series are visible, conventional examples of children’s fantasy. As we show below, our findings would hold were we to substitute other series. Focusing on the ways children’s series continue to follow the logic of the *Odyssey* is a deliberate choice. Children’s fantasy enjoys a prominent position at the forefront of the genre commercially and critically. This is especially evident in the context of the post-Harry Potter “fantasy revival” (Levy and Mendlesohn 167), but the link between children’s fiction and the modern fantasy genre runs

back through the genre's history to J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald, and E. Nesbit. The link between fantasy and children in the contemporary book market is bolstered by the common assumption that "children read fantasy; adults read realism" (3). The view that fantasy is childish pivots on the understanding that fiction for a juvenile market is necessarily simple and derivative, both descriptors that are levelled routinely at popular fiction more broadly (Gelder 18–19; Levy and Mendlesohn 3). If children's fiction distils conventions and reveals their barest bones, then our analysis of children's fantasy stands to offer a springboard for further research that explores – through the perspective of popular fiction – how ingrained elements adapted from Greek myth persist in the structures of the broader fantasy genre.

Artemis Fowl is a best-selling, eight-volume series about a teenage criminal mastermind who, in the first volume, is determined to capture for ransom one of the fairies his research tells him live under the ground. Over the course of the series, he attempts to intimidate, outwit, and ultimately assist the fairies with his wealth and resources. The series overtly draws on its national context with use of Irish folklore, which in itself demonstrates children's fantasy's continued and close engagement with narratives adapted from its ancient roots. Scholarly interest in the series focuses on its use of Irish cultural elements and combination of magic and technology (Keenan; Doughty) or discusses the books in relation to posthumanism and gender (Pugh; Skelley; Chanda).

The Laws of Magic has received practically no scholarly attention. The five-volume series follows the adventures of Aubrey Fitzwilliam, the magically talented son of a prominent politician, who struggles to overcome his self-induced health condition and thwart the nefarious plans of Dr Tremaine. We include an Australian-authored series in line with David Carter's assertion that "the transnational nature of popular fiction networks is best appreciated from the perspective of one of their more remote nodes" (349). If contemporary children's fantasy as a subgenre continues to recycle narrative elements of the *Odyssey*, we should be able to trace these in texts authored at the anglophone fiction industry's periphery.

While both the Artemis Fowl series and The Laws of Magic do contain direct references to Greek myth, these are not major plot points across the series. Our discussion covers the major references in the Artemis Fowl series. In The Laws of Magic, Adonis (*Blaze* 304), Stymphalian birds (*Blaze* 117), Odysseus and the Sirens (*Word* 124), and caryatids (*Hour* 394) appear. The fact that Greek myth is not central in a direct way sets these series apart from series that foreground their mythic roots, notably Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. We began our research with the hypothesis that ancient stories influence contemporary children's fantasy systemically and intrinsically. We are interested, therefore, in texts that do not foreground their use of Greek mythic elements, that do not have overarching plots explicitly based on adaptation of ancient narratives. We are influenced here by Erling B. Holtmark who evaluates the mythic episode of *katabasis*, the journey to the underworld, in various genres of film, deliberately discussing films with "no overt relationship to the mythic background which informs them" (25). Just as Holtmark discusses how mythic patterns "have worked themselves into the very marrow" of film (24), we are concerned with resonances of myth in the structures, narratives, and characters of children's fantasy.

Richard A. Spencer's *Harry Potter and the Classical World* is one of the most detailed studies on the links between children's fantasy and Greek myth to date. However, Spencer's treatment of fantasy runs against the grain of the approaches to contemporary popular fiction studies with which we are sympathetic. Spencer seeks to legitimise Harry Potter by highlighting features that align the series with high literary values and, in his view, elevate the series above the rank-and-file of fantasy fiction. Spencer makes comparisons between themes, type-scenes, and characters in Harry Potter and classical mythology, including a character comparison between Harry and Odysseus. However, he prioritises advancing "the cause of education in classics" (4) and gives credence to arguments that attempt to raise Harry Potter above fantasy and popular fiction due to its allusions to the classics (9). Our motivation in tracing the influence of the *Odyssey* on selected children's fantasy texts is not to elevate them to the status of literary fiction. Rather, as popular fiction researchers, we were excited to discover what examining the link between the two can add to the understanding of fantasy fiction.

2. Throwing Hooks Back to the *Odyssey*

Stories of coming-of-age are common in many genres but are fundamental to both ancient mythical stories such as the *Odyssey* and contemporary children's fantasy novels. Children's stories are nearly always about their protagonists' personal growth (Trites 10), and in fantasy, the quintessential quest or journey is "usually interpreted as a metaphor for a coming of age" (Mendlesohn 7). The first four books of the *Odyssey* are a coming-of-age narrative; they tell of Telemachus's journey to adulthood and the forging of his identity (Knox 9). Telemachus travels to the courts of prominent kings where, under the guidance of the appropriately named "Mentor" (Homer, *Odyssey* 2.301), he learns how to conduct himself in the world. While Odysseus's experiences in the *Odyssey* do not constitute a coming-of-age, they do facilitate his growth as Peter Toohey argues. He learns the folly of angering the gods and the value of hiding his identity after hubris leads him to reveal his name to Polyphemus, which allows the Cyclops to call on his father, Poseidon, for retribution (Toohey 53, 56–58). Odysseus subsequently disguises his identity to return home, showing restraint that he previously lacked, thereby demonstrating his growth.

Artemis Fowl and *The Laws of Magic* exemplify the centrality of coming-of-age to contemporary children's fantasy. Artemis develops from a boy who is so evil that his hostage Holly cannot "even find the words" to describe him (*Artemis* 122) to a responsible and emotionally stable young man. In the first volume, Artemis takes on the role of breadwinner in his father's absence, but goes about things in an immoral and risky way. He cheats the fairies out of their gold to restore the family fortune and nearly loses the respect of his bodyguard/father figure Butler (*Artemis* 16), who initially trusts him "implicitly" (*Artemis* 67). However, he shows signs of moral decency and emotion, particularly in his final deal with Holly when he trades half the gold back for her to restore his mother's health. In subsequent volumes, Artemis works together with Holly and the fairy authorities in an alliance that sees him making ever more moral choices. Colfer explains, "this kid is the most evil kid in the world. By the end of the eight books he saves the world" (Blumson).

Artemis's personal journey from criminal to hero is a key strand running through the series.

Over the course of *The Laws of Magic*, Aubrey navigates adolescence and attempts to position himself in relation to his father and the world. He also struggles to cope with the disastrous results of a magical experiment that he performed in a moment of arrogance and overconfidence, which leaves him battling to stay alive and keep his soul and body together. In the first book, *Blaze of Glory*, Aubrey and his friend George investigate a series of mysteries. Although Aubrey undertakes these adventures because of his desire to solve puzzles, he is also driven to create an identity separate from his father's and by the need to find a magical cure for his condition. These internal motivations are paramount for Aubrey, who cannot achieve maturity and integration into adult society until he has navigated the struggles that plague him.

An element that traces the structural and thematic legacy from our selected children's fantasy series to the *Odyssey* is katabasis. We examine katabasis as a form of the quest – a quintessential feature of contemporary fantasy (see Kleczkowska for analysis of katabasis in *His Dark Materials*). Katabasis is a stock episode in coming-of-age narratives. In a symbolic sense, katabasis is a cycle of initiation that can be understood to involve a death of the child, who is reborn as an adult. Holtsmark writes that katabasis “seems inevitably to entail at some level a search for identity”, which results in the hero assuming “roles of increased responsibility and leadership ... on the basis of his experience underground” (26). Growth and learning are explicit in Odysseus's literal journey to the underworld (and in his multiple symbolic katabatic experiences). He travels to the underworld to “consult the ghost of Tiresias” (Homer, *Odyssey* 10.541) and converses with past heroes who instruct him on how to get home and the importance of life. Both Artemis and Aubrey experience death and rebirth through katabatic episodes that create dramatic changes. Artemis dies in volume eight, *The Last Guardian*, and his disembodied soul drifts like a ghost for six months until a clone body is ready for him to inhabit (298–300). When he returns to the body, Artemis has lost his memories – he is born anew and cleansed of his past crimes. Aubrey is pulled to the brink of “true death” by his failed magical experiment before managing to bring himself back (*Blaze* 30), and this is the catalyst for much of his development over the series.

Symbolic katabatic experiences also permeate Artemis and Aubrey's coming-of-age journeys. Artemis's engagement with the People (the fairies) has katabatic resonance, as they literally live “underground” (*Artemis* 32). Artemis interacts with the People both in his world and theirs, and this experience changes him so profoundly that he wonders, “am I not Artemis Fowl?” (*Atlantis* 42). Anna Bugajska notes that the Gnommish words along the bottom of each page of *The Atlantis Complex* (volume seven) read, “I thought I knew everything. Now I think I know too much. This new knowledge, these compulsions are taking me over” (196). Aubrey's trip to the Mire is a similarly transformative, symbolic katabasis. His associate Jack is a Charon figure, guiding Aubrey and his companions through the dark and dingy streets of the Mire to the ruins of a church and graveyard (at midnight). Aubrey and his friends are captured at the church and taken down to the “crypt” (*Blaze* 324). In that space, Aubrey has one of his closest brushes with true death. Before ascending the ladder out of the crypt, he is forced to take drastic magical action,

which invigorates him and makes him feel “stronger than he had for some time” (*Blaze* 334). In both cases, katabatic experiences are catalysts for change that move each boy towards adulthood.

Cycles also represent growth more generally in both series and in ways that throw hooks back to the *Odyssey*. The Artemis Fowl series cycles back to where it started. The final novel ends with a slightly altered version of the opening paragraph of the first book as Holly relates Artemis’s tale to his clone to bring back his memories (*Last* 306). The notable difference is that Artemis is not perpetrating these deeds in the final book, but rather hearing about them as though they are the actions of a third party. At the end of *Blaze of Glory*, Aubrey retakes the physical test that he fails in the opening pages. In his first attempt, Aubrey focuses on his handicap and how “much harder” things are as a result of his condition (*Blaze* 1). At the end of the novel, he tells himself that it is “only a physical struggle” and that he can “cope” and “succeed” (*Blaze* 392). Similarly, Spencer identifies cycles at all levels of Harry Potter, including in the meeting of eyes that marks Harry and Professor Snape’s first and last contact in the series (282). Bruce Loudon suggests that the entire *Odyssey* consists of a narrative pattern that is repeated three times, in which Odysseus arrives on an island, receives divine help to approach a powerful female, and comes into conflict with a group of men (6–7). The first two instances of this pattern are significant as they act as models, preparing Odysseus for his final homecoming. Cycles therefore emphasise the growth of the protagonist by drawing attention to the gulf between the person he was and the one he has become. The echoes of the *Odyssey* are especially loud in such moments of repetition and return.

3. Finding Odysseus in Children’s Fantasy

Male protagonists in contemporary children’s fantasy often display what Claudia Nelson describes (in relation to Victorian children’s literature) as “androgynous” masculinity, as opposed to representing a “self-consciously masculine” ideal (525). Widespread perceptions of childhood and the typical plot structures of children’s fantasy offer two explanations as to why. According to Susan Honeyman, many adults posit children as “neuter” or “genderless” (169) due to the possibilities childhood offers for putting “the oppressive gendering of sexual maturity temporarily on hold” (168). Additionally, by virtue of being children, the protagonists of children’s fantasy are physically smaller and weaker than the often-adult antagonists they face and are therefore incapable of matching these antagonists in combat (Tierney 77–78). Characters such as Artemis and Aubrey must find alternative methods than physical strength if they are to have any chance of besting the villains they pit themselves against. Magic or supernatural abilities play a role in many cases, and these are typically interwoven with inventiveness and cunning.

Analysis of the characterisation of the male protagonists in our two contemporary children’s fantasy series finds a mirror held up to Odysseus, who shows signs of a more androgynous masculinity than his peers. Margalit Finkelberg argues that Odysseus differs from the typical heroic Greek man because he employs “*metis*, ‘cunning’, as opposed to the *bie*, ‘might’, of other Homeric heroes” (2–3). Odysseus’s disguises and use of the “unheroic” bow and arrow are specific features that set him apart (Finkelberg 2–3). According to

Finkelberg, the Iliadic notion where “being a hero amounts to readiness to meet death on the battlefield” is “the sense in which the words ‘heroism’ and ‘hero’ are used today” (12). Odysseus is rebuked by Achilles, who says “I hate that man like the very Gates of Death who / ... stoops to peddling lies” (Homer, *Iliad* 14.182-83). Odysseus is a tactician, a deceiver and a persuasive speaker (Knox 37) who is “never tired of twists and tricks” (Homer, *Odyssey* 13.332). He is characterised by “cunning intelligence” (Wanner 213), which Kevin J. Wanner argues is a trait typical of mythic characters with “fluid” (219) gender identities.

The dominance of intelligence over physical ability for Artemis and Aubrey traces a line from both protagonists through Nelson's androgynous masculinity to Odysseus. Similarly to how Odysseus is “known to the world / for every kind of craft” (Homer, *Odyssey* 9.21-22), Artemis is “a child prodigy” (*Artemis* 1). He is consistently described as physically inferior – “a pale adolescent” (*Artemis* 5) whose life in front of a computer screen has “bleached the glow from his skin” (*Artemis* 3). His “famously unsophisticated” motor skills earn him the nickname “*Left Foot Fowl*” (*Atlantis* 7). Holly, a three-foot tall elf, knocks him to the ground with one hit because Butler, his “giant” of a bodyguard (*Artemis* 5), is not around to prevent her punch from landing. Tison Pugh argues that Artemis's “masculinity is suspect” due to his “effete mannerisms” and resistance of puberty (132). Artemis sees puberty as something to be overcome and actively denies the interest in girls that emerges in him as the series progresses. Bugajska also discusses Artemis's androgynous features, noting a magical fusion with Holly that occurs in the series (195). This physical blurring of gender lines, and Artemis's name, which he inherits from Greek goddess of the hunt (*Eternity* 267), position Artemis as androgynous.

Aubrey's gender is similarly blurred. While “Aubrey” is a name of masculine origin, it is often considered feminine in contemporary times (Harper). Aubrey also relies on disguise to achieve his aims and admits that he has “dressed as a woman beggar” (*Blaze* 300). Physically, Aubrey is described as more poet than athlete (*Blaze* 2) and does not fit in with the hefty boys that populate Stonelea (a military school). Just as Butler provides physical backup for Artemis, George can “make fists drop simply by appearing on the scene” (*Blaze* 3). And like Holly, Aubrey's friend Caroline is far more physically competent than he is (*Blaze* 288). Both protagonists rely on qualities other than physical strength while alternative central characters in the series bring physical strength or prowess to the group.

The above pattern is familiar in contemporary children's fantasy more broadly. Cressida Cowell's Hiccup from the *How to Train Your Dragon* series is a physically unimpressive Viking (Tierney 76) who is consistently outdone by his female peer Astrid. Johnathan Stroud's Nathaniel (Bartimaeus Sequence) holds a similar position in relation to his enemy and occasional ally Kitty. John Flanagan's protagonists Will (Ranger's Apprentice) and Hal (Brotherband) are both expressly represented as cunning and witty while their friends or associates are brawny (Tierney 76). As a slightly different example, Knorr argues that Pullman's Lyra is comparable to Odysseus in terms of cunning intelligence.

Growth and plot resolution in Artemis's and Aubrey's case, as well as Odysseus's, are tied to overcoming ego or arrogance, a trait that Nelson positions as the antithesis to Victorian androgynous masculinity. Intelligence and arrogance are closely aligned for all three protagonists. Moments of

arrogance bred from overconfidence in their intelligence lead to many of Artemis's and Aubrey's problems. Aubrey is guilty of arrogance in the magical experiment that is only rectified at the end of *The Laws of Magic* series. He recognises as much after it all goes wrong, berating himself for "heedless bravado, for reckless posturing and for shoddy preparation" (*Blaze* 28). Artemis's arrogance comes back to bite him in volume three particularly when his carelessness leads to him being "hoodwinked" by Jon Spiro, the villain of the volume (*Eternity* 19). And as mentioned above, Odysseus's inability to leave Polyphemus believing his name is "Nobody" (Homer *Odyssey* 9.410) directly causes the hero's suffering. Overcoming the problems arrogance creates for both Odysseus and these contemporary protagonists requires them to "kill the masculine ego" (Nelson 537) and embrace their more androgynous and fluid qualities.

Odysseus, Artemis, and Aubrey achieve fluidity of identity with disguise. Aubrey relies on beggar's disguises both to rescue his father and to escape his identity as "Sir Darius Fitzwilliam's son" (*Blaze* 39), which allows him to explore his city without the "responsibilities of being Aubrey Fitzwilliam" (*Blaze* 298). According to Wanner, like gender fluidity, disguise and metamorphosis are essential to "metic actors" (219) or characters who rely on cunning intelligence (218). Odysseus dons disguises to avoid the risk of being recognised, particularly when he returns to Ithaca in his "beggar's" guise to slay the suitors (Homer, *Odyssey* 13.500). Artemis, too, uses disguise, which affords him fluidity of age as he turns to pseudonyms like "Malachy Pasteur" (*Time* 249) to achieve ends he is unable to as a child (Bugajska 199). These children's fantasy series draw on the patterns of the *Odyssey* to craft fluid identities, freeing protagonists from the constraints of childhood, social positions, or family ties.

4. Tracing Shadows of Ancient Fathers

Family ties of the kind Aubrey seeks to escape frequently bind the young protagonists of children's fantasy. Roberta Seelinger Trites argues that family is central to stories aimed at younger children as those stories are concerned with "the child's sense of Self and her or his personal power" (3). Pre-teen protagonists are embroiled in issues of their "immediate environment, usually represented by family and home" (Trites 3). Artemis, Aubrey, and other children's fantasy protagonists wrangle with family – for male protagonists especially, they wrangle with their relationship with their father/father figure. Hiccup is one example: he must find a way to relate to his father and prove his worth when his father's notions about what makes a king are incompatible with Hiccup's abilities. Similarly, at the beginning of Holly Black and Cassandra Clare's *Magisterium* series, protagonist Callum believes everything his father tells him and is desperate to please him. The differences of opinion that emerge between father and son as the series progresses cause significant conflict for Callum. Morrigan Crow, from Jessica Townsend's *Nevermoor* series, is initially defined in relation to her father, a prominent public figure whose reputation is damaged by the curse on his daughter. He continues to influence Morrigan's sense of self-belief and worth once she is free of him and other father figures (such as her mentor Jupiter) take his place. The *Odyssey* provides a template

for genre tales in which fathers are key to the identities and internal conflicts of characters in story worlds of power and magic.

The paternal shadow looms large for Artemis and Aubrey. Artemis tries to account for his father's absence by taking on his role as "the man of the house" in the first novel in the series (*Time* 67). He succeeds to the point that, in one fit of madness, his mother mistakes Artemis for her father (*Artemis* 116). As Pugh notes, Artemis is a "hybrid figure mature in intellect yet immature in body" (132). He is forced to stand in for his father in the first novel, and only rarely does anyone see "the boy Artemis might have been" if his father was present (*Artemis* 72). Only once he has restored the family fortune and his mother's health can he let go of his role as father. When his mother hugs him at the end of the first book, he feels like "the boy" he is (*Artemis* 276).

However, this stability does not last. After his father's return in the second book, Artemis's identity issues worsen. In volume three, he struggles to adjust to the role of a child, subordinate to the will of his parents. In volume five, he and Holly become "a part of each other" when they exchange an eye while time travelling (*Lost* 379). In volume six, Artemis once again takes on the role of his father when his father enlists him to find a cure for his mother's illness. When he sees his sick mother, he thinks to himself, "I am the parent now She is the child" (*Time* 323). In this volume, he has a crisis of identity in that he pits himself against his younger self, who is distinctly more ruthless than he is. Through this, he realises that he is "running out of palatable crimes" when "not so long ago, nearly all crime had been acceptable to him" (*Time* 355).

The most significant challenge to Artemis's quest for identity comes in *The Atlantis Complex* when he is diagnosed with a psychological condition of the same name brought on by guilt about his past deeds. This condition manifests in a split personality called "Orion" (*Atlantis* 95), who takes over Artemis's consciousness. Orion is a chivalrous and gentle version of Artemis, with none of his intellectual powers and "no idea how to handle the actual world" (*Atlantis* 129). Artemis describes Orion as the "mortal enemy" of the Greek goddess Artemis (*Atlantis* 237). However, stories of the Greek Orion also represent him as a hunter who is temporarily blinded by an enemy and who the virgin goddess kills for attempting to rape her (Smith and Trzaskoma 4, 164). Like the Orion of myth, Orion is 'blind' to the problems around him and instead focuses his efforts on wooing "the lovely lady" Holly (*Atlantis* 96). Much like the goddess Artemis kills Orion to maintain her identity as a virgin huntress, Artemis must 'kill' Orion to regain his identity.

Aubrey can only progress towards maturity in *Blaze of Glory* as his relationship with and understanding of his father deepens. Aubrey feels pressure due to his father's public presence and achievements. During the physical test, other characters taunt him with comments, such as "you want to fail, like your old man?" (*Blaze* 4) and "your old man isn't here to help you now" (6). Many of Aubrey's decisions and conclusions are based on his father. He keeps the failure of his magical experiment to himself out of fear that it would "be exploited by his father's political enemies" (37). He also has "a chance to do something worthy" at a shooting party where his cousin Prince Albert is threatened by magical creatures (146), but considers the result a failure as his father "would never have allowed" matters to turn out as they did (147). The Percy Jackson series provides another example of an adolescent who seeks the approval of a great or powerful father figure. He and other "teenage demigods

resent their parents' absenteeism, covet their power, and seek to prove themselves by opposing their elders" (Morey and Nelson 235). The maturation of such characters relies on their eventual success in stepping out of the shadow of their fathers and discovering or creating a place in the world for themselves, a narrative trajectory that frequently takes the *Odyssey* as its model.

In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus provides a prototype for Artemis and Aubrey's journeys in search of identity. Telemachus's experience with his father is a mixture of the patterns Artemis and Aubrey experience (see Knox on father/son relationships in the *Odyssey*). Odysseus is absent, which leaves Telemachus to run the household and protect his mother from the suitors who urge him to "direct her to marry" (Homer, *Odyssey* 2.125). Athena tells him: "you must not cling to your boyhood any longer – / it's time you were a man" (1.341–42). In response, he acts by travelling to find out the fate of his father once and for all, so he can take the necessary steps as the man of the household. Telemachus feels uncertainty about his connection to such a hero as Odysseus, commenting that "mother has always told me I'm his son, it's true, / but I am not so certain" (1.249–50). Like Aubrey's father, Odysseus sets high standards to live up to. Telemachus finds his own identity and confidence when he fights with his father to expel the suitors near the end of the *Odyssey*.

The identity that Artemis and Aubrey eventually forge for themselves is closely tied to their intelligence, a trait that sets the two apart from their fathers. Artemis's father recognises his son's value in *The Time Paradox* when he urges Artemis to find a cure for his mother. He tells Artemis, "it's time for you to earn that reputation of yours Whatever we have to do, son" (*Time* 9). His father not only lacks a plan or strategy, but is a man to whom "the idea of harming another creature would be repugnant" (*Arctic* 120). He lacks the ruthless cunning that so often makes Artemis's plans conceivable and achievable. The "double share of Fowl guile" that Artemis is gifted with allows him to do whatever it takes mentally and morally (*Arctic* 7) when his father cannot. Like Artemis's father, Aubrey's mother hands him the responsibility of saving his father. She tells him: "find him, Aubrey. I don't care how, but go and bring him back home" (*Blaze* 295). Aubrey's capacity to do so depends not only on his position as one of "those few" lucky enough to have the "ability" to do magic (*Blaze* 13), but also on his intelligence and inventiveness in harnessing that ability. When Aubrey successfully rescues his father, Darius reveals his "envy" of Aubrey's magical ability and "resourceful" brain (*Blaze* 380), recognising Aubrey's distinct value. By rescuing their parent and making the family whole again, both protagonists successfully distinguish themselves from their fathers and eventually achieve full initiation into the sphere of adulthood as Telemachus does.

5. Conclusion

Our analysis of *Artemis Fowl* and *The Laws of Magic* finds that foundational plot and character features of children's fantasy at play in these series are generated from the *Odyssey*. Throwing hooks from our two series to the *Odyssey* reveals resonances of katabasis and cycles of growth in these contemporary children's fantasy narratives. Aubrey and Artemis also share features with the *Odyssey*'s characters – features that are tied to their specific

position as child protagonists, thus revealing a particular robustness to the strands that reach back from the subgenre of contemporary children's fantasy to the heart of the ancient canon. Through our selected case study, we have sought to offer a set of worked examples to show that the stories of contemporary children's fantasy fiction continue to be deeply and inextricably rooted in Greek myth. We hope that the analyses above describe a subgenre enlivened and enriched by its dependence on ancient tales such as the *Odyssey*. Fantasy's deeply adaptive sensibility is generative of new opportunities for storytelling, which the two contemporary children's fantasy series we discussed show in action through and in tandem with their appropriation of features from the *Odyssey*. The next step may be to add new lines to the chart of fantasy's essential intertextuality through wider and deeper textual analysis that explores how the storytelling conventions of children's fantasy integrate its multiple literary histories or that look beyond the subgenre to the distinct and overlapping ways in which elements adapted from Greek myth are ingrained in the structures of the broader fantasy genre. We are curious now to look up from the pages of fiction and text-based scholarship to ask whether the subgenre's status as a frontrunner in the fiction industry is related to publishers' confidence in the appeal of tried-and-true patterns of storytelling, to the attachment of writers to the conventions of their chosen genre, and to the concomitant demand from readers for the rewards of familiar reading experiences.

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