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# **Making a Hero**

Vogler's Supportive and Opposing Archetypes  
in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

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## **Abstract**

According to Christopher Vogler, all unforgettable stories contain a distinctive dramatic structure and an evolving hero accompanied by other archetypal characters. This essay examines the popular children's book *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, and which impact the different archetypes in the story have on Percy's growth as a hero. Traditionally, the mentor archetype is mostly credited for the hero's transformation, but in this essay, I will argue that even though their contribution varies, supportive and opposing archetype roles are equally necessary for Percy's development. In the end, I will rate Percy's growth as a hero based on his level of self-sacrifice, self-esteem and self-confidence, and claim that the supportive archetypes foremost contribute to Percy's self-esteem and self-sacrificing side, whereas the opposing archetypes primary help raise his confidence and awareness.

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## Introduction

In the middle of the twentieth century, Joseph Campbell, an American Professor of Literature, discovered what he reckoned was a pattern embedded in all immortal stories. Campbell, influenced by Carl Jung's theories on archetypes and myth, claims that every memorable tale, no matter how old it is or which culture it derives from, has a specific dramatic structure along with a repeating cast of character roles (3-5). This theory which is referred to as "the Hero's journey" or "the Monomyth", meaning "one story", was originally formulated by Campbell in *a Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949 (Coker).

A theory comparable to the Hero's journey was introduced by the well-known Russian scholar Vladimir Propp twenty years before Campbell published his book. Propp discovered a similar pattern in old Russian folk tales which consisted of both recurring plot steps and character roles (Propp 25-65). Whether or not Campbell was influenced by Propp is hard to tell since Propp's book was not translated into English until many years after Campbell's theory was already well-known.

Christopher Vogler, one of Campbell's many followers, modernised the concept in his book *The Writer's Journey* after Campbell personally advised him to continue with his work (Vogler Xxxi). Vogler kept the foundational elements of Campbell's theory but introduced a reformed plot structure that takes the heroes from the beginning to the end of their journeys in twelve steps. He also narrowed down Campbell's recurring character roles to eight indispensable archetypes which he argues every notable story must contain: heroes, mentors, shadows, threshold guardians, allies, tricksters, heralds and shapeshifters (26).

A book that follows Vogler's theory is *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, the first book in Rick Riordan's series about the twelve-year old demigod Percy. The story is about Percy, who after discovering he is the son of Poseidon, is called on a quest along with his allies Grover and Annabeth. Percy's mission is to bring back Zeus' stolen lightning bolt in order to prevent a war between the Gods. Hades, the god of the underworld, is originally pointed out as the thief, but Kronos, the imprisoned old Titan god, turns out to be the real antagonist in the end.

Earlier research has established that this book entails all twelve steps of Vogler's Hero structure and contains each one of the eight archetypes (Sugeng). Likewise, a similar study has proven that both plot and characters are consistent with Propp's narrative theory (Hilman).

Riordan has over the years been criticised for copying *Harry Potter* (Hartness), but seeing as both Riordan and Rowling implemented the Hero's journey structure and aimed to

reach children and preadolescents readers, it is not surprising that certain elements are similar. In fact, the whole Hero's journey theory has been criticised for making the world of fiction too predictable. Margery Hourihan, for instance, points out in *Deconstructing the Hero*, that stories based on the Hero's journey are "so familiar that they present no challenge to the reader's interpretive or critical skills" (9). Vogler, however, argues that storytellers ought to look at the Hero's journey as "a form, not a formula, a reference point and a source of inspiration, not a dictatorial mandate" (xix ), and claims that when the structure is used wisely, the story will mirror universal fears, and make readers feel as if they have been through a satisfying complete experience and having learned something about life or themselves (5). He therefore concludes that if the goal is to reach a wide audience that can relate to the story, a certain type of form is necessary (xvii). Since the Percy Jackson books have been widely popular amongst children and sold more than 20 million copies around the world (Mead), it is fair to say that Vogler has a point. Even if literature critics fail to see the value of the Percy Jackson books, they have served a purpose for many children who have identified with Percy and his transformation as a hero.

Although former studies have established that *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* contains Vogler's archetypal characters, there is no research that reveals how the archetypes participate in Percy's growth. According to Vogler, the eight archetypes all play a part in the hero's development (31). However, the common belief seems to be that the mentor is the main source for the hero's change, whereas the other archetypal roles have not been given the same importance. Simon Sverin, for instance, states in his thesis on mentor archetypes, that endings where the hero ends up self-realised, are "made possible thanks to each hero's mentor" (9). The mentor role obviously should not be underestimated; the famous mentor figures Yoda and Gandalf have important roles to play in Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. Having said that, very few people focus on the impact the antagonists like Darth Vader and Sauron has on Luke Skywalker's and Frodo's progress.

In this thesis I will highlight the importance of all archetypes, both the supportive and the opposing ones, and analyse how they all contribute to Percy's development. I will rate Percy's growth based on Vogler's three criteria for a fully matured hero: self-sacrifice, self-esteem and self-confidence. Lastly, I will claim that Nietzsche's widespread motto "what does not kill us, makes us stronger" is appropriate for Percy's transformation, and that if it had not been for the antagonist characters in this book, any amount of influence by the mentors would not have made Percy grow into a confident, self-sacrificing person. After defining each of the archetype roles in the book, and analysing the impact they have on Percy's development,

I will argue that even though the supportive archetypes like mentors, allies and tricksters are important in that they contribute to Percy's self-esteem and selflessness, the opposing archetypes like threshold guardians, shapeshifters and shadows are of equal importance, as they help raise his confidence and awareness.

## **The Hero's Journey**

Inspired by Campbell, Vogler, claims that various popular stories throughout history all share the same plot patterns and character types that attract our subconscious mind, and that these recurring principles can be found in "the crudest jokes to the highest flights of literature" (4). As Vogler points out, there is nothing revolutionary about the Hero's journey; Campbell's great accomplishment was simply to recognise, give name to, and organise the patterns that had been there all along, engrained in every immortal story. For the remainder of this thesis I will not delve deeper into Campbell's original theory. Instead I will primarily focus on Vogler who has broken down and expanded upon Campbell's theory but kept the basic principles.

Vogler's theory consists of two parts: a specific plot structure, which I will only touch on briefly, plus the recurring character roles known as archetypes. Henceforward, when I mention the term "the Hero's journey," I will refer to Vogler's definition. The Hero's journey is, according to Vogler, made up of twelve steps which take the protagonists out of their ordinary world into a new world full of tests, allies and enemies. After having faced death in this new world, the protagonists return home where they are challenged one last time to prove that they have grown into complete and accomplished heroes. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, this structure is not a rigid form; all stories do not follow the exact order of the twelve steps. However, stories built on the pattern of the Hero's journey involve the steps in one way or another (7).

The second part of Vogler's theory derives from Jung's idea of archetypes. According to Jung, archetypes are recurring character types which we all contain and are surrounded by. They exist in the illusory world in the form of stories, in our inner world as dreams, thoughts and feelings, and in the outer world as personality traits in people we encounter. Thus, the recurring characters in stories such as the ally, the wise old man/woman and the dark-minded antagonist are the same characters who appear in our dreams and daily life (Jung 13-14). These archetypes, just like the twelve plot steps in the Hero's journey, are constant throughout all times and cultures and are recognisable to everyone since they are deep-rooted in our subconscious mind (Vogler 5). Many storytellers, consciously or unconsciously, create

characters that resonate with the energy of these archetypes to create dramatic experiences in their stories. However, the archetypes are not always manifested as definite characters; sometimes they are merely functions carried out by characters to carry the story forward. Hence, a character can manifest the qualities of more than one archetype; an ally for instance can momentarily put on the mask of a trickster and become the comedian for a while. Although there are endless numbers of archetypal characters and relationships, Vogler points out that most of them are variations and modifications of eight foundational archetypes which are all necessary for stories. Heroes, the most pivotal archetype of them all, encounter the other seven archetypes both externally and internally throughout their journeys (26).

In the following paragraphs, after defining the heroes, I will proceed to describe the characteristics of the other archetypes, how to spot them, what their roles are and how their presence affects the heroes. Lastly, I will explain the archetypes' psychological function and what they symbolise internally when appearing in the human- and consequently the heroes' mind.

Heroes are the characters we as readers mostly identify with, the characters who have both admirable and imperfect qualities that we can recognize in ourselves or strive for. These characters are motivated by universal needs that everyone can relate to: "the desire to be loved and understood, to succeed, survive, be free, get revenge, right wrongs or seek self-expression" (Vogler 30). The protagonists are usually the ones that take on the main role of the hero, in other words the characters that grow the most and make active choices to bring the story forward. However, it is common for other side-characters to manifest the archetype by acting in a self-sacrificing manner. According to Vogler, all well written characters have traits of more than one archetype even if they mostly commit to one role (31-33). Although the stereotypical heroes are driven and determined, some heroes lack self-motivation or have too many fears to take on the adventure and keep the story moving. They therefore need other archetypes to push them along until they are confident enough to take action themselves. Other heroes are hybrids. They not only temporarily put on the mask of another archetype, they merge with it and let it become a large part of their character. The trickster-hero is one example of such a hybrid (Vogler 35).

As the heroes mature, their most prominent feature is the willingness to sacrifice their own needs for a greater cause. The word "hero" stems from Greek and means "to protect and to serve" (Vogler 29). Vogler goes deeper into the psychological meaning of heroes. He refers to Freud who claimed that the immature hero represents the ego, the part of us which feels alone and separate to the rest of the world. The goal for the transforming heroes is to see through the

illusion of the ego, to gain self-esteem and feel a sense of wholeness after realising they are part of something bigger - the self. Vogler says, heroes must face all their internal parts and let them be welcomed and integrated for the ego to become the self: i.e. fully progressed heroes (29-30). This touches on the philosophical and spiritual question regarding the meaning of life. Vogler states himself that “Heroes are symbols of the soul in transformation, and of the journey each person takes through life” (37). Another person who writes about the hero’s evolution is Carol S Pearson in her book *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes we Live by*. She claims that fully matured heroes, which she refers to as magicians, feel abundant, worthy and safe even if they happen to be confronted and experience pain (6).

A common criticism against the ideal of heroism, is that it encourages people to fight wars by glorifying self-sacrifice (Vogler xxi). This is also the most common critique against utilitarianism, an ethical theory which heroism is based on. Critics argue that one person’s life should not be sacrificed for the greatest well-being of the greatest number of people (Ogan 71). However, Vogler reasons that if it is a worthy enough cause, self-sacrifice can be worth it (xxi). Pearson takes a more rigid utilitarian approach and argues that fully developed heroes understand that “... nothing essential ever is lost. Sacrifice becomes the organic and gentle letting go of the old to make way for new growth, new life“ (15).

To conclude, fully developed heroes have three qualities which I will analyse Percy’s growth by: first of all they have the confidence and the skills to tackle life’s obstacles, secondly they make self-sacrificing choices for a bigger cause than themselves, and lastly they have high self-esteem, i.e. they have accepted every part of themselves which makes them feel as if their intrinsic value cannot be compromised no matter what (Vogler 30).

Heralds play an important but often small role in Hero stories. Their main purpose is to bring new information to the heroes, and in this way set the quest in motion. They are catalysts that inform the heroes of threats or treasures to be sought for in another world. After receiving this information, the heroes’ balance in their ordinary world is disturbed, and can only be restored by taking on the adventure (Vogler 55). Sometimes heralds are not characters but manifest themselves in the form of a letter or another source of information. Other times mentors briefly put on the mask of a herald. Furthermore, in some stories, heralds are villains who challenge the heroes to take action (Vogler 56-57). According to Vogler, the psychological function of heralds is to bring about change. He says they sometimes come to us in our dreams or in real life as people or ideas we encounter when we are stuck in a situation that we deep down want to remove ourselves from (56).



Tricksters' primary function is to add another perspective to stories and to see things from a less serious viewpoint. They want change, regeneration and are "the natural enemies of the status quo" Vogler points out. They challenge the heroes to question themselves and their circumstances. Likewise, they bring about a welcome sense of comic relief after a long build-up of stressful events, and by generating laughter they relieve stress. Vogler claims that tricksters symbolise the healthy part of us that find our predicaments amusing instead of taking them too seriously (77-78).

Mentors' foremost role is to prepare heroes for upcoming obstacles and set them on the right path for growth. They do this in various ways. Giving the hero valuable information is one way. Another method is to present the heroes with gifts that will come in handy later on in the story (Vogler 42-43). Furthermore, when heroes become reluctant, the mentors are there to give them courage to face their challenges. At some point in the story, Vogler states, mentors disappear to let the heroes handle their own struggles (12). Alternatively, mentors may be absent in the story, and show up merely as a memory of wise people the heroes have come across earlier in their lives (Vogler 47). On a psychological level, Vogler claims, mentors symbolise the self, the higher wiser part of us that is fearless and virtuous (40).

Allies' main function is to serve the heroes and keep them safe. They can either be compliant, listen and defend the heroes' actions no matter what, or they can challenge the heroes to open themselves up, becoming more balanced in the process. They do not always present themselves as humans, occasionally they take the form of animals, angels or some other magical shape. Either way, they have the heroes' best interest in heart (Vogler 73-74). Every so often allies take on the roles as mentors, and advice, guide or warn the heroes about upcoming obstacles. However, some allies take their time, and do not show their true loyalty until the heroes earn their respect. Psychologically, according to Vogler, allies symbolise our internal voices who support us through thick and thin (71).

Threshold guardians are often the villains' subordinates. They appear at any point in the story where the heroes are about to enter a new stage and face great challenges. As doorkeepers, architectural features, forces of nature or other forms of blockers, they are there to test the heroes to see if they have what it takes to move forward; to check if they have enough tools to get by and if they are truly committed to the quest (Vogler 52). When heroes come into close encounter with the threshold guardians, they are forced to find a solution, to put their knowledge into practise, and challenge their fears. They can either attack, manipulate or make allies of the guardians. On a psychological level, Vogler says, threshold guardians represent our inner

demons: “the neuroses, emotional scars, vices, dependencies, and self-limitations that hold back our growth and progress” (49-50).

Shapeshifters waver back and forth between being allies respectively enemies to the heroes. Usually they start out as allies but later on reveal their true side by betraying the heroes. Vogler claims, shapeshifters bring doubt and tension into stories and create more dynamic relationships. Furthermore, they act as catalysts for transformation (59, 61). Occasionally heroes take on the role as shapeshifters to get past villains or other obstacles (Vogler 61-63). Psychologically, according to Vogler, shapeshifters symbolise the act of our suppressed feelings resurfacing, emotions that have been buried due to gender roles or societies’ strict ideals are suddenly expressed (60). According to Jung, women and men all consist of the same energies and qualities but have been discouraged by society to express the ones that are atypical for their gender (Jung 32). He points out, much like Freud, that in order to see through the illusion of the ego, we must first allow all our feelings to exist inside of us (Jung 42).

Shadows are the true villains in stories, the great enemies that want to destroy the heroes or eliminate their goals. They need not be thoroughly evil or calculating; most shadow archetypes do not even see themselves as wicked. To them, the heroes are the obstructive forces who prevent them from reaching their goals; from the shadows’ perspective, they are the heroes of their own journeys (Vogler 67). On a psychological level, Vogler says, shadows symbolise our unwanted or suppressed feelings. These do not necessarily need to be uncomfortable feelings; they can be pleasant feelings that we do not believe we are allowed to feel (65). Vogler points out that all feelings are healthy and that it is the repression of feelings that can turn to destructive energy (68).

## **Percy’s Journey**

Percy is the hero of the story. He is the classic protagonist through whose eyes the reader gets to follow the quest. He is the character that grows the most and has both flaws and admirable features for the reader to identify with. In the beginning of the story, however, Percy lacks both self confidence and self-esteem. His difficulties in school along with his fits of anger, make him feel like an incompetent and hopeless outcast: “Grover and I sat on the edge of the fountain, away from the others. We thought that maybe if we did that, everybody wouldn’t know we were from that school – the school for loser freaks who couldn’t make it elsewhere” (Riordan 8). His inability to focus and control himself not only makes him feel incompetent but also causes him to feel worthless as a person. Even though his mother Sally showers him with unconditional

love when they are together, Percy feels rejected by her constantly sending him away to boarding schools. Similarly, with his father's complete absence during his upbringing, and his stepfather Gabe's mental abuse, Percy seems to lack the belief in his own intrinsic value. Furthermore, Percy's socioeconomical status contributes to him feeling even more worthless. "What I didn't tell them was that I'd have to get a summer job walking dogs or selling magazine subscriptions, and spend my free time worrying about where I'd go to school in the autumn" (22). It is evident that Percy thinks very little of himself at the start of the book. He does not accept himself for who he is, nor does he feel that he has the capacity to handle life's hurdles. Due to the archetypes presented in the story, Percy gets closer to evolving into a mature hero though; his confidence and self-esteem grow, and he eventually makes self-sacrificing choices for a bigger cause. Although there are plenty of archetypical characters that appear in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, I have chosen to focus on the ones that have the most significance for Percy's growth.

### **The Supportive Archetypes**

Heralds, tricksters, mentors and allies are the supportive archetypes in the story. They are the ones who help Percy get through difficulties and/or bring him forward on his quest.

The first herald Percy encounters is Mrs Dodds, one of Hades' underlings, who disguises herself as Percy's teacher (Sugeng 18). Although Mrs Dodds does not have Percy's best interest at heart like the rest of the supportive characters, when she transforms into a fury, she disrupts Percy's reality and opens him up to a more surreal dimension. More importantly, Mrs Dodds' threatening appearance motivates him to seek out the sheltered camp for Demigods and thus brings him forward on his journey. As Vogler states, the hero's world will never be the same after meeting a herald (55).

Chiron, first known as Percy's teacher Mr Brunner, is the second person to throw Percy off track by challenging his newfound safety zone at the camp. Just as Percy starts to feel accepted and at home at his new place, Chiron reveals that Zeus blames him for stealing his lightning bolt. He gets Percy to reluctantly agree to find and return the bolt to Zeus by informing him that the world and nature will be at war with itself and millions of people will die should Percy not accept the quest (138). At this point Percy is not aware that Hades is holding his mother hostage, and that by going on the quest Percy has the opportunity to meet Hades and bring his mother back. Instead it seems to be Percy's grief and feelings of despair and numbness that gets him to agree to the journey (139).

*Percy and the Lightning Thief* is also filled with trickster appearances; mostly by Grover, the satyr, but Percy often puts on the mask himself. During a confrontation with Gabe, Percy's abusive stepfather, Percy's internal trickster appears: "Maybe if I kick you in your soft spot, I thought. And make you sing soprano for a week" (Riordan 35). Without suppressing the anger he feels towards Gabe, Percy welcomes the feeling and channels it through a joke in his mind. By choosing not to act on his rage, he avoids any irreversible repercussions.

Vogler points out, that tricksters are usually the comedians of the story who bring humour to a situation that has become stagnant (77). Grover's trickster moves certainly help Percy turn his helplessness around in various situations. On one occasion when Percy is frozen by fear after encountering Medusa, Grover makes a comic appearance with his winged shoes fluttering in the sky. Grover's light-hearted entrance snaps Percy out of his immobilised state and jolts him into action instead (180).

I agree with Sugeng that Chiron plays the typical mentor role in the story (17). Chiron even states it himself during a conversation with Percy: "You see, aeons ago the gods granted my wish. I could continue the work I loved. I could be a teacher of heroes as long as humanity needed me" (Riordan 82). Moreover, Chiron seems to correspond to Vogler's definition of a mentor. To begin with, his job is to teach and prepare Percy for his upcoming quest: "Mr Brunner expected me to be as good as everybody else, despite the fact I have dyslexia and attention deficit disorder and I had never made above a C-in my life. No, he didn't expect me to be as good; he expected me to be better" (7). Before and during camp, Chiron teaches Percy Greek mythology which later comes in handy when Percy meets various Greek gods and demigods. Secondly, during Percy's first combat with Mrs Dodds, Chiron throws Percy a magical pen which after removing the cap grows into a full-size bronze sword (13). This gift is used by Percy on many occasions and gets him out of trouble several times. Likewise, Chiron provides Percy with healing food and drinks to bring on his quest (149).

From Jung's perspective, both Percy's mother and father have their own clear archetype roles: "The mother" and "The father" (Krushner). However, from Vogler's viewpoint, Poseidon primary takes the role of a mentor, whereas Percy's mother Sally mostly falls under the ally category.

Percy's relationship with his father is unstable. Through most of the story Percy carries a feeling of being abandoned by Poseidon. Even though he only meets his father at the very last part of his journey and Poseidon primary takes the role of an "absent mentor" (Vogler 47), Percy is reminded of his presence through other characters. He receives both guidance and magic pearls through his father's aide Nereid, the spirit of the sea (Riordan 272). After Percy

finds out that Poseidon cannot cross Hades' territory except by an invitation and needs Percy to bring back Zeus' lightning bolt, Percy feels conflicted: "'I'm being used.' My dad needs me [...] I didn't know whether to feel resentful or grateful or happy or angry. Poseidon had ignored me for twelve years. Now suddenly he needed me.'" (145). It is clear that Percy longs for his father's love, but at the same time he has an inner supportive ally that knows he deserves more than to be taken advantage of.

When Percy finally meets his father at Olympus, he is greeted with insensitive words. As Poseidon confesses his wrongdoing to Zeus and admits that he broke the Godly oath when impregnating Percy's mother, Percy's feelings of abandonment come rushing back: "Wrongdoing. A lump welled up in my throat. Was that all I was? A wrongdoing? The result of a god's mistake?" (Riordan 341 ). However, Poseidon's first words are seen in another light as he further explains the reason for wishing Percy was never born. Poseidon feels remorseful for the fate he has brought upon Percy. He would rather not have a son who must suffer the consequences of being a demigod, eternally chased by monsters, without the advantage of being immortal like a real god. As Poseidon continues to speak from his heart, Percy senses his father's love: "Do not misunderstand me. Whatever else you do, know that you are mine. You are a true son of the Sea God." This is the part where Percy's self-worth grows the most, where the tormenting feeling of being rejected disappears. Poseidon leaves Percy with some final words of wisdom as they part for an unlimited time:

'Obedience does not come naturally to you, does it?'

'No... sir.'

'I must take some blame for that, I suppose. The sea does not like to be restrained.' (345)

This unrestrained side becomes a limitation to Percy in certain situations. When trapped in confined places, he feels uneasy and claustrophobic (205). However, when at the very end of his journey, Percy must make the decision whether to go his own way or stay at the camp and hide from potential monsters, he uses this knowledge about himself to rationalise his choice of moving on (375).

Even though she has the inherent role of a mentor, Percy's mother Sally foremost takes the part of an ally. She is the typical self-sacrificing mother who only wants what is best for her child: "She's the best person in the world", Percy says about her (29). "When she looks at me, it's like she's seeing all the good things about me, none of the bad" (32). However, since Sally's

motives for sending Percy away to boarding school have been hidden for so many years, Percy still feels like a burden to her: “‘Are you going to send me away again?’ I asked her. ‘To another boarding school?’” (39). When he later finds out that her reason for sending him away has been to protect him from godly monsters, Percy’s love for his mother grows even stronger along with his sense of self-worth as he realises that he has never been rejected by her after all (159). Likewise, Sally’s choice to marry and put up with Percy’s stepfather Gabe for the sole purpose of disguising Percy’s godly smell from the monsters, has the same self-esteem building effect on Percy. Her love is what motivates Percy to go on his quest. After Sally is killed by a minotaur and sent to Hades’ underworld, she becomes Percy’s main drive to return the lightning bolt from Hades: “The truth was, I didn’t care about retrieving Zeus’s lightning bolt, or saving the world, or even helping my father out of trouble. [...] All I cared about was my mom” (159). Even though Percy’s motives seem selfless as he sets out on an adventure to save his mother, his intentions so far are in reality mostly self-serving; he cannot cope with the feeling of missing his mother and wants her back. This is understandable, but at this point Percy shows no evidence of heroic self-sacrifice.

Besides being Percy’s ally, Annabeth, the daughter of Athena, plays another important mentor part. She teaches Percy more about the new world of Greek magic than anyone else; she lets him know all about opposing forces, what to expect from them and how to avoid them. She informs Percy of how the monsters in this world are primal forces and cannot die. They can be killed, but only to reform in another situation (86, 97). She also teaches Percy what the gods are like, and most importantly, she is the one who reveals to Percy that he is a demigod and has special skills instead of flaws: “Your mind is hardwired for ancient Greek. And the ADHD – you’re impulsive, can’t sit still in the classroom. That’s your battlefield reflexes” (88). For the first time in Percy’s life he sees his qualities as gifts instead of burdens. As his journey progresses this becomes more apparent: “Annabeth was right about my dyslexia: Ancient Greek wasn’t that hard for me to read.” (107). Percy gradually starts to perceive himself in a more positive light.

As mentioned before, Annabeth primarily takes the role of an ally. Percy’s first encounter with her happens after his mother has just died. He is in a vulnerable state, both physically and emotionally, and Annabeth watches over him whilst spoon-feeding him healing pudding. Her attention comforts Percy and makes him feel at home (57). However, Annabeth has a hard time accepting Percy in the beginning, and her reasons for helping and protecting him are purely selfish. She wants to escape the camp, and she admits to Percy, whom she refers to as Seaweed Brain, that the only way for her to do that is by going on a quest: “‘I’ve been

waiting a long time for a quest, Seaweed Brain,' she said. 'Athena is no fan of Poseidon, but if you're going to save the world, I'm the best person to keep you from messing up'" (148). Annabeth gets Percy out of trouble many times and pushes him along on those occasions when he ends up in shock after encountering various villains (168, 178). However, she fits Vogler's definition of a reluctant ally and does not show her true loyalty until Percy earns her respect (Vogler 71). Their love for each other grows over time and their relationship changes into a more equal one. At one point when the underworld frightens Annabeth, she looks for Percy's reassurance and takes his hand (290). This shows that she is no longer solely Percy's helper and that Percy has a chance to be supportive as well.

Grover, Percy's first real friend in life, is the second vital ally figure in Percy's life. His relationship with Percy is more consistent from start to finish. Grover is the true definition of a loyal friend; he is constantly looking out for Percy whether he wants it or not. He covers for Percy, lies for him and does anything to keep him alive whilst simultaneously making him feel accepted, loved and supported. Grover's belief in him raises both Percy's self-worth and confidence: "We try to sniff out the half-bloods who have the makings of great heroes." Grover says reassuringly (116). When Percy asks him to come along on the big quest Grover does not hesitate. This brings out Percy's grateful side: "I felt so relieved I wanted to cry, though I didn't think that would be very heroic" (146). Likewise, Grover gives Percy the chance to reciprocate Grover's kindness, and thus evokes Percy's altruistic side. When the minotaur kills Percy's mother, Percy saves Grover's life despite being filled with grief after seeing his mother die (58). As he is highly empathic and intuitive, Grover also helps Percy to let his true feelings resurface: "'Look, Percy... I'm pretty good at reading emotions. You're glad your dad is alive. You feel good that he's claimed you, and part of you wants to make him proud'" (192). Instead of resenting his father, Percy now realises that he deep down craves Poseidon's attention.

Close to the end, Grover once more demonstrates his true loyalty. As Percy only received three magic pearls from his father's aide Nereid to help him escape the underworld, Percy is now faced with the dilemma of leaving one person behind. The pearls are their only way out, and since each pearl only carry one person, Percy will either have to abandon his mother, Grover or Annabeth, or stay behind himself. In this situation Grover selflessly offers his own life: "'Leave me here, I'm a satyr [...] We don't have souls like humans do. He can torture me until I die, but he won't get me forever. I'll just be reincarnated as a flower or something...'" (316). At this point Annabeth chooses to do the same thing, and both Grover and Annabeth turn into hero archetypes which has an immense effect on Percy. His gratitude for their friendship brings forth his own ultimate sacrifice:

They had done nothing but save me, over and over, and now they wanted to sacrifice their lives for my mom. I turned and faced my mother. I desperately wanted to sacrifice myself and use the last pearl on her, but I knew what she would say. She would never allow it. I had to get the bolt back to Olympus and tell Zeus the truth. I had to stop the war. She would never forgive me if I saved her instead. 'I'm sorry,' I told her. 'I'll be back. I'll find a way.' (317)

Although Percy hopes that he will find a way to get his mother back eventually, he is not certain that it is possible. One might argue that his biggest sacrifice would be to give up his own life, but as Percy's biggest fear is not to die, but to be without his mother, this is actually his ultimate sacrifice.

## **The Opposing Archetypes**

Threshold guardians, shapeshifters and shadows are the opposing archetypes in the story. They are the antagonists who in more or less brutal ways all attempt to stop Percy from finishing his journey. However, by standing in the way of Percy, they simultaneously force him to step out of his comfort zone and offer him the opportunity to test his various survival skills.

The first threshold guardian Percy comes across is the bull-man like minotaur who tries to stop him from reaching the camp for Demigods, acting as a test to see if Percy is ready to enter the new world (Sugeng 20). When the minotaur approaches him, Percy almost fails the test by freezing up, but after the monster has killed his mother, anger replaces his fear and he uses this feeling to kill the beast and save Grover's life. With his last surge of energy, Percy then carries an injured Grover all the way to camp where he finally collapses: "I was crying, calling for my mother, but I held on to Grover. I wasn't going to let him go" (55). Through all these actions Percy proves that he is ready for the next big step on his journey.

The second threshold guardian who hinders Percy is Charon, the security guard who only allows dead people through to the underworld. Percy pretends to be dead from drowning, but Charon quickly exposes him. However, by offering Charon money and promising to persuade Hades into giving him a pay raise, Percy gets past him (286-287). According to Vogler, the most effective way to get through to the threshold guardians is to get under their skin and find out what their needs are (49). Here Percy is challenged to understand the needs of



the guard in order to continue. Sympathy is awoken in him as he relates to Charon's financial troubles, and for a second time Percy proves that he is committed to the journey.

The same goes for Cerberus, the three-headed Rottweiler that guards the gates to Hades. Again, Percy is forced to understand what the needs of a threshold guardian are. Percy attempts to throw a stick as a distraction, but Cerberus does not react. Annabeth, however, has better luck. Raised amongst dogs, she throws the dog a ball instead and commands it to sit as they confidently walk past (295- 297). Although Annabeth is the one who succeeds at getting them through the gates, Percy still shows proof of commitment and sympathy:

I thought maybe Annabeth and I both had the right idea. Even here in the Underworld, everybody, even monsters, needed a little attention once in a while. (298)

Cerberus' unwillingness to obey them at first compels Percy to truly understand the dog's desires and gives him a chance to see beyond his own self-serving needs.

The last threshold guardian Percy encounters is the guard to Olympus. At this point Percy knows how to handle blockers. As the guard discovers Zeus' lightning bolt in Percy's rucksack, Percy uses it to his advantage:

The guard looked inside at the metal cylinder, not getting what it was for a few seconds. Then his face went pale.  
'That isn't...'  
'Yes, it is,' I promised. 'You want me to take it out and –' (337)

Percy quickly detects the guard's respect for the lightning bolt, and assertively and cheekily manipulates his way into Olympus to meet his father. His confidence has grown and there is no doubt in his mind anymore whether or not he will finish the journey.

The shapeshifters in this story are plentiful. Many characters portray themselves as allies but are later revealed as villains out to kill Percy. For instance, Auntie Em, the hospitable owner of a curio shop, turns out to be the evil-eyed Medusa (173), and an innocent-looking Chihuahua ends up being a fire-breathing Chimera (207). Through these experiences Percy's naivety turns into cautiousness. When he is greeted by the shapeshifting doorman at the luxurious hotel he passes, Percy immediately suspects mischief: "I'd learned to be suspicious, the last week or so. I figured anybody might be a monster or a god. You just couldn't tell" (258).

Likewise, when Crusty, the bed salesman, turns out to be Procrustes, the sadistic stretcher; Percy is one step ahead of him and handles the situation immaculately (279).

Hades is an unusual shapeshifter in this story as he goes from being a villain to an ally instead of the other way around. When Percy finally meets Hades, he initially feels offended after being falsely accused by him (313), but after discovering that Hades in fact has been duped by Kronos, his anger is replaced by sympathy (314). When Hades later releases Percy's mother and sends her back home, Percy's respect for him grows even deeper (345).

Sugeng claims that Luke, the son of Hermes, is the most pivotal shapeshifter in the story (27). I would have to agree as Luke's deceitfulness is maintained the longest and has the biggest impact on Percy. From the moment they meet, Luke pretends to be Percy's mentor and friend and offers him advice along with gifts to make him more comfortable at the camp (100). Close to the end, however, Luke reveals that he is the one who stole the lightning bolt to set Percy up; since the beginning of the story, he has been in collusion with Kronos, whose plan is to overthrow the Olympus and get rid of anyone who does not obey him (368). Any gift or lesson Percy received from Luke was a trap, set up to kill Percy later. Although Percy's former encounters with shapeshifters soften the fall, Luke's betrayal still has a big effect on him, especially after Luke releases a scorpion that almost poisons Percy to death (369). According to Vogler, shapeshifters alter the reality for heroes and challenge their former beliefs (61). Luke turns out to be an important catalyst for Percy's transformation; thanks to him, Percy's childlike outlook on life changes into a more conscious and precautious way of perceiving life.

The shadows surround Percy from the beginning to the end of the book. Kronos is, according to Sugeng, the main shadow figure of the story (25). I agree that he is the darkest antagonist in the book, but since Percy only ever meets him indirectly through his underlings Ares and Luke (307), I will not analyse him further.

Nancy, Percy's bully of a classmate, is the first shadow in the story whose appearance demonstrates Percy's difficulties to control his anger. Percy struggles with his temper after Nancy maliciously dumps her food in Grover's lap. He fails to restrain it and ends up throwing Nancy into a water fountain (9). Shortly after this incident, Percy recalls another situation where a disrespectful teacher called him lazy and triggered him into throwing an anger fit (17). These situations amongst others demonstrate how Percy tends to act out in conflicts and show his rage rather than to handle things in a level-headed way. Though, according to Vogler, this is healthier than bottling things up (68), there are sometimes dire consequences for Percy. However, when Percy actually encounters real conflict and danger, he freezes up and plays it safe. When Mrs Dodds transforms into a fury, Percy anxiously obeys her instead of defending himself (11).

Chiron luckily comes to his rescue and throws him the pen-sword: “My knees were jelly,” Percy says. “My hands were shaking so bad I almost dropped the sword” (13). It is clear that Percy has no trust in his own capacity at this point. However, his courage grows over time, and although his first response is to freeze up when the minotaur kills his mother, Percy’s fear eventually turns into anger which he uses to overthrow the monster with (55).

Later at camp, when Clarisse, the arrogant daughter of Ares, attempts to drown Percy in the toilet, his fear does not present itself at all; instead his immediate reaction is rage which causes the water in the other toilets to explode and blast Clarisse out the door. His confidence shines through his comment as he passes Clarisse: ‘You want to gargle with toilet water again, Clarisse? Close your mouth.’ (92). Percy’s capacity to control the ocean to his advantage contribute to his belief in being able to handle future situations (110, 122).

When Hades once again sends the furies to attack Percy, Percy gets a chance to build his confidence without any water at hand. As the furies appear on the bus from Manhattan, Percy fights off all of them with his sword skills and saves Grover and Annabeth: “I looked at the open doorway. I was free to go, but I couldn’t leave my friends” (165-166). Hence, not only does he feel more confident, the furies also help bring out Percy’s self-sacrificing side since he has the opportunity to save himself without rescuing his companions.

The confidence that Percy gains from facing the opposing archetypes is not consistent until the end of the story though. Vogler claims, that if heroes are suddenly overtaken by selfishness, or self-destruction, that is because their inner shadows have appeared and are preventing them from reaching their selfless goals and becoming true heroes (66). In Percy’s case, there are times along his journey where his inner shadow appears and makes him doubt himself:

Hades had tried to kill me three times so far. I was ready to take him on...  
‘Whoa, boy, said the small part of my brain that was still sane. You’re a kid.  
Hades is a god.’ (144)

This inner shadow, and hesitant feeling, also appears as Annabeth orders Percy to slice off Medusa’s head to prevent Medusa from turning them into statues (181). However, Percy’s bolder side wins the argument and he gets out of both predicaments, stronger and more self-assured (318, 147).

When Percy later in the story meets Ares, the pompous god of war, and is challenged into an unnecessary argument, his primal feelings of anger once again get triggered and he

struggles to control himself: “He reminded me of every bully I’d ever faced: Nancy Bobofit, Clarisse, Smelly Gabe, sarcastic teachers – every jerk who’d called me stupid in school or laughed at me when I’d got expelled” (243). Instead of ignoring Ares pretentiousness and continuing with the quest, Percy becomes arrogant and puts himself in a dangerous situation where Ares might retaliate. Thankfully, Grover steps in and saves Percy by interrupting the conversation. This shows that Percy’s progress is not straightforward, and that he still must learn to control his temper. However, close to the end, Percy gets a chance to show his growth in this area as Ares arrogantly challenges him to a fight:

‘My strength is unlimited and I cannot die. What have you got?’

A smaller ego, I thought, but I said nothing. (326)

Percy uses his collected fighting skills, his inner trickster, wisdom and power to control the sea to take Ares down: “My body thought for me. The water seemed to push me into the air and I catapulted over him, slashing as I came down” (327).

Despite his size and strength, Percy’s stepfather Gabe does not frighten Percy at any point. When bullied by Gabe in the beginning, the only reason Percy does not reciprocate is because of the silent threat of his mother facing abuse by Gabe later: “I wanted to punch him, but I met my mom’s eyes and I understood.” (34). In the end, as Sally no longer needs to stay with Gabe for the sake of Percy’s safety, Percy has the opportunity to kill Gabe with Medusa’s head. But instead Percy’s inner mentor appears, and he makes the wise decision to leave the head with his mother, thus giving her the chance to fight her own battles (353).

Percy’s final test and the last shadow he encounters is the scorpion that Luke releases on him. He is left in despair with only a minute to spare before the poison kills him: “I stumbled towards the camp, and the nymphs stirred from their trees. ‘Help,’ I croaked. ‘Please...’” (369). Chiron ends up saving him with his healing powers and Percy returns to health (370). Vogler points out that a fully matured hero should be able to handle any challenging situation by himself this late in his journey (12), but in my opinion asking for help can be seen as another skill and does not exclude Percy’s capacity to overcome challenges. As mentioned before, at the very end of the story, Percy decides to leave camp despite the possibility of attracting monsters whose sole purpose is to destroy him. This shows that his confidence in himself has grown into a solid and deep-rooted one. Otherwise he would not have the courage to leave his safety zone. Before Percy leaves, he shouts out to his father, hoping he can hear his words: “I’ll be back next summer... I’ll survive until then. After all, I am your son” (375). These last words

prove that Percy, after sharpening his inherent skills through practise, believes that he can cope with any kind of predicament he may find himself in the future.

## Conclusion

Percy goes from having a very low opinion of himself to liking himself and believing in his capacity to handle life's obstacles. Supportive archetypes like mentors, allies and tricksters primarily bring out Percy's self-sacrificing side and help him see his self-worth. Mentors and allies like Annabeth, Grover, Chiron, Sally and Poseidon foremost contribute to Percy liking himself, and prepare him by giving him helpful insights and strategies for any upcoming opposing archetypes. Through them Percy turns his former flaws into assets and gets to know himself for who he really is. Moreover, they give him the chance to love, receive love and act in a self-sacrificing manner. Percy's inner trickster helps him accept his anger without suppressing it, whereas Grover's occasional trickster role helps Percy snap out of paralysis by defusing overly emotional situations. One might argue that defusing a strong feeling is a way of suppressing it, yet if it is a matter of life and death it is clearly more beneficial to act instead of shutting down. Mrs. Dodds' and Chiron's herald parts are as crucial as the rest of the supportive archetype roles. If it wasn't for them disrupting Percy's life and pushing him forward, Percy's journey would not even begin, and he would miss out on the opportunity to grow.

The opposing archetypes like threshold guardians, shapeshifters and shadows mostly contribute to raising Percy's confidence and awareness. For every obstacle Percy overcomes, his confidence grows, and he gets a chance to witness his skills in action. It would be impossible for him to truly trust his competence without having the opportunity to test it. Threshold guardians like Charon and Cerberus help Percy bring out self-assertiveness and recommitment to his journey, but they also evoke sympathy much like the supportive archetypes. Shapeshifters like Luke and Medusa wake Percy up out of his naïve worldview. These kinds of archetype characters often have a tendency to generate cynical mistrust, but in Percy's case they mainly seem to bring about much-needed awareness. Shadows like the furies and Ares give Percy the opportunity to test his skills and inner control. After encountering and defeating them, his belief in himself grows stronger. To conclude, the supportive and opposing archetypes are equally important for Percy's development, but all have different parts to fulfil. Together they are like instruments orchestrating a symphony, where the brighter clarinet is just as significant as the mellow sounding contrabass.

Percy seems to fulfil most of the criteria for Vogler's definition of a fully matured hero. Firstly, Percy has the confidence to face any potential monster out in the real world when he decides to leave camp at the end of the story. Secondly, he sacrifices his own needs for world peace as he leaves his mother behind in the underworld. The third criterion regarding self-esteem is debatable whether or not Percy manage to fulfil. It is possible that Vogler would define Percy as a fully matured hero since Percy turns his weaknesses into strengths and accepts them, but I would argue that it is not that clear-cut. To me self-esteem and true acceptance would be for Percy to embrace his flaws even if they do not benefit him or the world. This is my concern when it comes to hero stories: that the readers subconsciously start to value themselves by their ability to be brave and self-sacrificing whilst simultaneously condemning their less heroic sides like fear and selfishness. Hopefully *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* conveys a more constructive and empowering message and leaves the readers with the realisation that no matter how unfortunate their preconditions and upbringing are, they have the capacity, much like Percy, to overcome difficulties, and that any villain that come their way may in fact make them stronger than they ever were before.

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