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**The endurance of Greek mythology: representations of the Minotaur in ‘Sítio do
Picapau Amarelo’ and ‘Percy Jackson’**

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*“And he continued to remind others that
one sure path into the world runs along
the printed page.”*

Bill Moyers

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Abstract

The Greek myths are, even years after their first written records, being revisited and retold in many different types of literary genres. The endurance of mythology has been consistent since its origins – its myths continue to influence lives and are still being revisited through time. Based on this, the aim of this study is to discuss Greek mythology's endurance by analyzing the different representations of the character Minotaur in Plutarch's version of the Greek myth and Monteiro Lobato's and Rick Riordan's modern renditions: *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo's O Minotauro* (1939) and *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* (2005). Considering matters of children's literature and classic literature, this study seeks to pursue cross-cultural and trans-historical connection in the interest of demonstrating the significance of mythology in western literature.

Key-words: Minotaur, Greek mythology, *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*, *Percy Jackson*

Resumo

Mesmo anos após seus primeiros manuscritos, os mitos gregos continuam a ser revisitados e recontados em diversos tipos de gêneros literários. A persistência da mitologia tem sido consistente desde as suas origens – os mitos continuam a influenciar vidas e ainda são revisitados através do tempo. Com base nisso, o objetivo deste estudo é discutir a persistência da mitologia grega através da análise das diferentes representações do mito do Minotauro na versão de Plutarco e nas adaptações modernas de Monteiro Lobato e Rick Riordan: *O Minotauro* (1939) em *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* e *Percy Jackson e o Ladrão de Raios* (2005). Considerando aspectos da literatura infanto-juvenil e da literatura clássica, este trabalho procura uma ligação intercultural e trans-histórica de forma a demonstrar a importância da mitologia grega na literatura ocidental.

Key-words: Minotauro, Mitologia Grega, *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*, *Percy Jackson*

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1. Introduction

The specific aim of this work is to discuss and compare two different representations of the Greek myth of the Minotaur in the children's books: *O Minotauro* (1939) by Monteiro Lobato and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005) by Rick Riordan, in contrast with the original version by Plutarch. By means of mythology, I seek to connect Brazilian and American Literature through their differences and similarities while highlighting the cultural richness these mythical narratives hold. As a broader objective I seek here to show the endurance of Greek mythology in western Literature.

The myth of the Minotaur is one of the most important myths of Greek mythology and, for that reason, there are numerous versions of the same story. Greek historian and biographer, Plutarch was one of the first authors to write the myth of the Minotaur in his book *Parallel Lives* published in 1517. It was a series of biographies of famous men, Greek and Roman, which includes Theseus' biography entitled *Life of Theseus*.

Greek mythology was initially a form of storytelling based on the oral tradition. Even in its earliest written records, it dates back to hundreds of years b.C. and, in spite of these long-standing ancient roots, Greek mythology displays a fundamental role in human development, more precisely in western literature. As one of the foundational sources of western literature and society, Greek myths are still being revisited and retold in many different types of literary genres.

The Greek myths encompassed beliefs and values that influenced the lives of people who acknowledged themselves and the world through their narratives. Dispossessed of modern science and techniques of proving and achieving answers, ancient cultures found in religious discourses ways of understanding human existence and searching explanations for

natural phenomena. As Mircea Eliade points out in his book *Myth and Reality* (1963), the myths were “the most general and effective means of awakening consciousness of another world . . . whether it be the divine world or the world of Ancestors” (139).

Mythology is timeless – its narratives continue to be meaningful for us and, for that reason, they are still studied and appreciated. This influence can be seen in many different fields and, for example, in literature, it is a constant presence – in references, quotations and adaptations which reveals the importance of myths in western culture. Mythology is also present in other fields of knowledge such in the psychoanalytical works of Sigmund Freud and the philosophical treatises of Friedrich Nietzsche.

The specific connection between literature and myth is plentiful and it can be observed in works from the past and present such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*; Shakespeare’s Hecate in *Macbeth*; in the poem *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri; in young teens’ literature such as the *Harry Potter* series and *The Chronicles of Narnia*; in other narrative genres such as movies and video games; and even in other art forms such as in paintings, sculptures, architecture and music – all kinds of genres and settings.

In Brazil, Greek mythology in children’s literature starts to grow in the first decades of the 20th century with Monteiro Lobato who had a significant role in spreading these stories in children’s imagination (Topan 2). *A menina do narizinho arrebitado*, published in 1920, was the first of Lobato’s children’s books which later became a book chapter in the first book (*Reinações de Narizinho*) of the *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* collection. Regarding the presence of mythology in Lobato’s work, the series includes *O Minotauro* (1939) and *Os Doze Trabalhos de Hércules* (1941). For his juvenile audience, Lobato retells these stories

didactically and with objective language, seeking to achieve an association between classic literature and the reality of children in Brazil.

The American author, Rick Riordan, is an important name in contemporary children's literature, especially after his worldwide famous bestseller *Percy Jackson & The Olympians* collection (2005-2009). *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* is the first volume of the series and it was published in 2005. In 2010, it became a movie which helped spread the story in different cultural contexts. Differently from Monteiro Lobato's *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*, the background for *Percy Jackson* is entirely inspired by Greek mythology.

In the next section I will discuss the theoretical background of my research in matters of children's literature and classic literature.

2. Review of Literature

This study aims at investigating different representations of the myth of the Minotaur, particularly in Riordan's and Lobato's children's books. These renditions share common features, but also differ in many aspects, as it will be discussed in the analysis section. The objective is to discuss how the Minotaur is represented in each of the narratives as well as the reasons each author had to depict the character as they did. The hypothesis is that they wanted to both preserve and spread classic literature – and that is why it endures. This review of literature will address the links between *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*, *Percy Jackson* and Greek mythology, pursuing cross-cultural and trans-historical connections that have no preceding critical literature.

2.1 Children's Literature: creating cultural and personal identity

The idea of revisiting classic texts to rewrite stories is not new in literature, especially in children's literature. In the latter, it is very common to find stories that are meant to teach, instigate, advise and explain things about the world – since it is mainly directed to younger audiences. According to Nelly Novaes Coelho, in her book *Literatura Infantil - História, Teoria e Análise* (1987), “Children's Literature is, above all, *literature*, or better, *art*: phenomena of creativity that represents the world, humanity and life through language” (10, my translation¹). This type of literature occupies a position of significance in the formation of young adults' minds and personalities. Coelho defines children's books as “messages” between adults (authors) and children (readers) – a communication between a person that detains the knowledge and teaches the one that must own the experience (13).

Coelho quotes Marc Soriano, a French philosopher who worked with Jean Piaget and studied short stories of Charles Perrault. He states that: “[Children's Literature] might not want to teach, but it is above all directed to an age of learning, especially language learning . . . If childhood is the age of learning, then all the messages during this period have necessarily a pedagogical mission.” (13, my translation²).

Monteiro Lobato's work complies to this theory. In *A Barca de Gleyre* (1964), a compilation of letters exchanged between Monteiro Lobato and his friend Godofredo Rangel, Lobato writes that children listen to the stories they are told “without paying any attention to the morality. . . The morals are kept in our subconscious to reveal itself later – while we

¹ In the original: “A Literatura Infantil é, antes de tudo, *literatura*; ou melhor, é *arte*: fenômeno de criatividade que representa o Mundo, o Homem, a Vida, através da palavra.”

² In the original: “Ela pode não querer ensinar, mas se dirige, apesar de tudo, a uma idade que é a da aprendizagem e mais especialmente da aprendizagem linguística. (...) Se a infância é um período de aprendizagem, (...) toda mensagem que se destina a ela, ao longo desse período, tem necessariamente uma vocação pedagógica.”

progress in comprehension.” (104, my translation³). In this sense, Greek myths, and mythology in general, are particularly powerful because they function as a provision cultural framework for a society or people to educate their young, providing them with means of coping with their passage through the various stages of life, from birth to death.

In *Literary Theory - A Very Short Introduction* (2000), Jonathan Culler reinforces these issues of constructing one’s cultural/personal identity by defending that literature encourages readers to relate to the characters. In his words, “poems and novels address us in ways that demand identification, and identification works to create identity: we become who we are by identifying with figures we read about.” (113).

The idea that children’s books carry messages that are meant to teach and enlighten children’s lives can be one of the reasons why classic texts are so often revisited in children’s literature – it is because these narratives are made for transmitting knowledge and forming the core of young adults’ personalities. Myths, fairy tales and fables are literary genres that carry a fantastic element – children are captivated by these fantasies and non-realistic scenarios and they are able to access knowledge through a world and language that is familiar to them. Coelho points out that this idea is similarly maintained by Psychoanalysis, which, like Literature, also understands “that fantastic stories’ symbolic meanings are associated with the longing crisis humans face throughout their emotional development” (33, my translation⁴).

³ In the original: “Guardam-nas de memória e vão recontá-las aos amigos – sem entretanto, prestarem atenção à moralidade, como é natural. A moralidade nos fica no subconsciente para ir se revelando mais tarde, à medida que progredimos em compreensão.”

⁴ In the original: “(...) ao provar que os significados simbólicos dos contos maravilhosos estão ligados aos eternos dilemas que o homem enfrenta ao longo do seu amadurecimento emocional.”

2.2 Classic Literature: Greek myths

In his book *Why read the Classics?* (2000), Italo Calvino addresses the magnitude of classical texts by acknowledging literature as something that defines humans. Among his fourteen reasons why one should read the classics, Calvino mentions “classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even in opposition to it” (7). Moreover, he continues, they “exercise a particular influence, both when they imprint themselves in our imagination as unforgettable, and when they hide in the layers of memory disguised as the individual’s or the collective unconscious” (4).

It is also important to consider the works of Joseph Campbell, one of the most important figures in mythology’s studies. Campbell discusses the role of heroism by saying that heroes in the stories embody moral objectives (104). In the book, *The Power of the Myth* (1991), Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers engage in a conversation – Bill Moyers as the interviewer and Campbell as the interviewed – about the importance of mythology and its significance in people’s lives:

. . . what human beings have in common is revealed in myths. Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story. . . . We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are. . . . Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life. (12)

Considering Literature as something that represents human life, behaviour, history and psychology, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the impact that a book, either ancient or modern, has in people’s lives. More than that, despite differences of social and cultural contexts, literature remains the same across time and cultures because it touches upon

subjects that are common to all humanity. In the end, in spite of all technological advancements, the emotional development of the human being stays the same.

2.3 The Study: tracing cross-cultural and trans-historical connection

It will be taken into account here a close and comparative reading of different versions of the Minotaur myth in the works of Plutarch, Monteiro Lobato and Rick Riordan. First, it will be presented a summary of each narrative analyzed focusing on different representations of the Minotaur, debating the similarities and disparities between them.

The questions that I seek to answer are:

1 - How is the Minotaur represented in all three books and how the cross-cultural and trans-historical diversity impact on the narratives?

2 - Why these contemporary authors, Lobato and Riordan, find so relevant to still write about myths that are so ancient? Why does mythology endure after so many years?

In order to answer these questions, in the next chapter, there will be a brief outline on the lives and significance of Monteiro Lobato and Rick Riordan, as authors and publishers, in the area of children's literature and how they envisioned their narratives when writing in this specific literary genre and its target readers.

3. The Authors: Monteiro Lobato and Rick Riordan

3.1 Monteiro Lobato: a visionary author and publisher

Monteiro Lobato is a Brazilian author born in 1882 in Taubaté county, São Paulo, where today is the town of Monteiro Lobato, which was named after its most important literary figure. Lobato was an editor and author. Although he started his literary career writing for

adults in 1918, he is best known for his children's books. One of his most treasured publication is the collection *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*⁵ which contain 23 volumes and was published between 1920 and 1947. Children's Literature in Brazil only leveraged when Monteiro Lobato decided to publish for kids. Lobato's approach to writing is characterized by simple and objective language, seeking to come close to the children's world and to convince them that a book is nothing less than their own home (Lobato 293)⁶. In *A Barca de Gleyre*, his advice to Rangel is to "write as if you were writing to your own . . ." (275, my translation⁷).

Lobato's concern with language can be perceived in *Dom Quixote para Crianças* first published in 1936 from the *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* collection, the character Dona Benta narrates the book *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes. However, the children have difficulties understanding the story because of the author's choice of words and style. Dona Benta then decides to tell the story in her own words and her idea is well received from Emília, who expresses her thoughts on the language used on the book: "We are not viscounts or viscountesses. We want it clear as egg white, transparent, without struggling to understand" (12, my translation⁸). Emília's opinion is that only people from higher classes (viscounts and viscountesses) are able to understand Cervantes' style. In being children, as well as people that live in a very different reality from the one Cervantes lived and wrote in, they need the language to be adapted. Lobato's views on writing for children can be seen through Emília's opinion in this excerpt.

⁵ Known as Yellow Woodpecker Farm or Yellow Woodpecker Ranch. According to Vanessa Gomes Franca (2009), there is no record of Lobato's books being integrally translated in English (49).

⁶ In the original: "Ainda acabo fazendo livros onde as nossas crianças possam morar."

⁷ In the original: "Escreve como se estivesse escrevendo para o teu"

⁸ In the original: "Nós que não somos viscondes ou viscondessas, queremos estilo clara de ovo, bem transparentinho, que não dê trabalho para ser entendido"

Lobato was raised in a background of deep socio-political and economic transformation. In the late 18th century and early 19th century, Brazilian society was starting to develop into an industrialized and democratic country. In this scenario, literature was still timid, with strong European features and it had very limited penetration in the less privileged classes. Writing and publishing was a challenge and the readership was limited to the Brazilian elite – the rates of illiteracy were up to 80% between the free population and 99,9% between former slaves. (Topan 6)

In this extremely arduous scenario for Brazilian literature, Monteiro Lobato started his career in publishing. He was a visionary figure who established an industrial outlook of literature and leveraged book sales and new publications. He intended to modernize and disseminate Brazilian literature across the national territory. In these terms, he founded his editing company named *Revista do Brasil Editores* and that is when Lobato noticed an unexplored gap in the market: children's literature. He can be considered a pioneer in the sense of seeing books as commercial products and his innovative business strategies. Lobato did not care for the profit that came with the boost on sales – he was first and foremost someone with a passion for literature.

Monteiro Lobato was not the first author in Brazil to write books for children, when he started, there already were celebrated authors such as Olavo Bilac who directed his writings to this target public before him around 1880 and 1910. However, Lobato defended a different approach – one that would become his signature: he could not find in children's literature of the time any book that could create an actual dialogue with the reality of Brazilian children:

Well, fables of our own, with animals from here instead of exotic ones, will result in something precious if made with craft and talent. The fables in Portuguese that I know of, in general translations from La Fontaine, are small blackberry bushes in the woods – pimply and impermeable. What can our children read? I don't see anything. Fables like these would be start of the Literature we are missing. (104, my translation⁹)

Monteiro Lobato used his stories to transmit world knowledge to his readership. Alongside his levelheaded linguistic approach (writing in colloquial language), Lobato explored world's events of the time, teaching children a little bit about the world and the context they lived in. *O Saci* (1927), the Brazilian folk tale, and *O Poço do Visconde* (1935), a book that discussed Lobato's views on oil exploration in Brazil, are some examples of his commitment with education.

It is in this sense of transmitting world knowledge in his narratives that his books involving Greek mythology appear. These stories close the cycle in *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* collection: *O Minotauro* (1939) and *Os Doze Trabalhos de Hércules* (1944).

The analysis proposed in this monograph follows Lobato's conception of literature and the education of children, focusing particularly on his book *O Minotauro* and the representation of this myth in his writings.

⁹ In the original: "Ora, um fabulário nosso, com bichos daqui ao invés dos exóticos se for feito com arte e talento dará coisa preciosa. As fábulas em português que conheço, em geral traduções de La Fontaine, são pequenas moitas de amora do mato - espinhentas e impenetráveis. Que é que nossas crianças podem ler? Não vejo nada. Fábulas assim seriam um começo da literatura que nos falta."

3.2 Rick Riordan: from bedtime stories to best-sellers

Rick Riordan is known as the author of the worldwide famous saga *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*. He is an American author and teacher born in San Antonio, Texas in 1964. The fact that Riordan is a contemporary author – his series of books in question were published between 2005 and 2009 – causes information about him to be more available, but also rather more personal than theoretical. All information gathered about him are found in his website in “An Interview with Rick” where Riordan discusses his thoughts on Greek Mythology and what led him to write Percy Jackson’s stories¹⁰.

Percy Jackson & the Olympians is a fantastic pentalogy on mythological fiction. The idea of revisiting Greek myths came from Riordan’s relationship with his son, Haley Riordan, who loved to listen to bedtime stories about Greek myths. Riordan also profited from his relationships in the classroom to polish his manuscripts. He says his students from sixth, seventh and eighth grade “test drove” the novel and they really enjoyed it – they helped with suggestions and ideas on the title. “I’m very glad I showed the novel to kids first”, he says, “After all, that’s who it’s written for.” Similar to Lobato, Riordan also started writing and publishing for adults, but confesses in his interview it bothered him when his young students asked him about his books because they were not appropriate for children.

Riordan also saw the importance of writing about mythology for younger audiences like Lobato. “I think you have to know Greek myths to understand where our modern culture came from.” he says, “It is part of being an educated member of society. . . . My goal for the novel is to get kids interested in learning more about Greek Mythology.” Besides, he chose to depict Percy, the protagonist, with ADHD/dyslexia inspired by his own son’s diagnosis and

¹⁰ Available on the link <<http://rickriordan.com/about/an-interview-with-rick/>>. Accessed 8 Nov. 2017.

reveals in the interview that his formula for writing for kids is not much different from writing for adults – he made sure the book was appropriate for children and that the descriptions were not very long since he knows by working with kids that they tend to lose their interest when the story does not have a “clear spot”. This shows Riordan also aimed at creating a dialogue between children and the books by familiarizing narratives that the kids could easily relate to.

4. Analysis

4.1 The Minotaur in Plutarch’s *Life of Theseus*

As previously stated, the myths were passed on through the masses via oral tradition which complicates the dissemination of the same exact story. As the narration of the stories change from person to person, details are lost and information is changed. Plutarch addresses this in *Life Of Theseus* saying that “there are many other stories about these matters. . . but they do not agree at all” (41). It is safe to say then that not all versions of the Minotaur, as well of Theseus’ adventures, are identical, but in this monograph I will be using Plutarch’s version.

The Minotaur was born from a relationship between a human, Pasiphae, and a white bull. Pasiphae was given in marriage to King Minos of Crete, with whom she conceived a child named Ariadne. King Minos received a white bull as a gift from Poseidon, the God of the Sea, and Minos was supposed to sacrifice it in his honor, but, the king could not sacrifice the bull for he thought the bull had the most beautiful fur. Poseidon was outraged by the king’s decision and so he cast a spell on his wife, Pasiphae, making her fall in love and mate with the white bull. As a result, she gave birth to the Minotaur, half-bull, half-man.

Pasiphae nurtured the Minotaur until it became too ferocious, so King Minos asked Daedalus, the architect, and his son Icarus to build a large sinuous labyrinth nearby their palace to hold the Minotaur. To feed the monster, every nine years (in some versions, every seven years), seven young men and seven young women were taken to the labyrinth as sacrifice, until Theseus volunteered to enter the maze and kill the monster. King Minos' daughter, Ariadne, fell madly in love with Theseus and helped him in his mission by giving him a ball of thread, which he would unroll along the aisles of the labyrinth and, therefore, be able to retrace his way out. Theseus then slayed the Minotaur and escaped the maze safely.

The myth of the Minotaur is one of the most well-known in Greek mythology and although it has different versions, all of the different renditions share some common basic elements. Plutarch's rendition is the most time-distant among the versions analyzed in this paper. Perhaps because this version was written for a different culture in a bygone era, or because children in ancient societies were treated as young adults, this rendition that involves sex, revenge and violence cannot be considered nowadays a juvenile narrative. Plutarch's version is more obscure and unrestricted. The cruelty of the sacrifice, for instance, is plainly described – “these young men and women, on being brought to Crete, were destroyed by the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, or else wandered about at their own will and, being unable to find an exit, perished there;” (29). Plutarch also uses Euripides' description of the Minotaur as a ferocious and beastly monster – “A mingled form and hybrid birth of monstrous shape”, “Two different natures, man and bull, were joined in him.” (29)

These sacrifices of “seven youths and as many maidens” (29) were described as “funeral games” and “tributes” to the son of King Minos, Androgeos, who was killed in Attica. “The

Cretans do not admit it”, Plutarch says, but “the Labyrinth was a dungeon, with no other inconvenience than that its prisoners could not escape”. (31)

The moment of Minotaur’s death and Theseus’ escape is described very briefly:

most historians and poets tells us that he got from Ariadne, who had fallen in love with him, the famous thread, and that having been instructed by her how to make his way through the intricacies of the Labyrinth, he slew the Minotaur and sailed off with Ariadne and the youths. (39)

Moreover, the hero, Theseus, is described as similar to Romulus¹¹ because both were said to be descendants from Gods, strong and sagacious men – “both were also warriors, as surely the whole world knoweth” (5). This description contributed to shape the readers’ interpretation of the Minotaur as a terrible monster since the only person who was capable of destroying him was Theseus and he was seen as a divine warrior.

As previously mentioned in the introduction, myths are considered a way of explaining the world in an archaic society dispossessed of science and technology. According to Campbell, myths have four functions: the mystical function, the cosmological dimension, the sociological dimension and the pedagogical function (33). Myths were initially stories that contained moral values and they continue to serve for the same matters until this day. Concerning the sociological and pedagogical functions, Campbell affirms that myths support and validate a certain social order and teaches “how to live a lifetime under any circumstances” (34).

¹¹ Plutarch was a Greek author who also possessed Roman citizenship. His writings transited between Greek and Roman mythological characters. Romulus, for instance, was the first king of Rome and its founder, alongside his twin brother, Remus. They were the sons of Mars, the Roman God of War.

It is following this moral idea given by Campbell that the myth of the Minotaur is discussed in this project demonstrating that myths survive through the years because they not only serve as recreative literature, but mainly, as instructive readings. Although Plutarch's version is not suited for children (in the eyes of a modern reader), it became the standard for subsequent narratives.

4.2 The Minotaur in Lobato's *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*

Greek mythology appears in Lobato's *O Minotauro* from 1939, and *Os Doze Trabalhos de Hércules*, 1944. His narratives do not reproduce the original myths, but create a new and authentic rendition. Interestingly, these Greek-related stories are the only stories in *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* collection that are not set in the family's farm, in Brazil, but actually in Ancient Greece. This demonstrates Lobato's concern with familiarizing his target public with the text – not only he brings classics inside Brazilian children's reality but he also takes these children to unknown realities.

Sítio do Picapau Amarelo tells the story of two children, Pedrinho and Narizinho, who live with their grandmother, Dona Benta, their cook, Tia Nastácia, a talking doll, Emília, and a talking corn cob doll, Visconde de Sabugosa, among other characters and talking farm animals. *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* is one of the most important children's books in Brazilian literature because it reached a young readership at its time period (1920 – 1947) and became a childhood symbol for many future generations. The adventures of the characters from *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* drew together children and young adults and brought enhancement of country's cultural roots and of the literature.

Lobato uses in his narratives reflections of Brazilian children's reality causing the kids to relate to the book. His narratives are set in a rural environment, considering that the

majority of children back then lived in small cities that were very little urbanized, Lobato creates characters that are similar to them: children who play with their feet on the sand, climb trees and own dolls made of corn cob and who are also curious and avid for knowledge. The animals in *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* are native from Brazil - no sheeps, deers, polar bears or anything that are not common in this tropical country.

In attempting to create a captivating narrative, Lobato mixes human characters such as Dona Benta, Narizinho, Pedrinho and Tia Nastácia with literary characters from fairy tales, fables and classics such as Snow White, Cinderella, Don Quixote and Hercules. There were also original characters created by Lobato himself such as Dr. Caramujo and Brazilian folklore stories such as Saci Pererê¹².

The myth of the Minotaur appears in the 12th volume of the *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* collection, in a story entitled *O Minotauro*. In this book, after an unfortunate accident in the farm during Snow White and the prince Condadad wedding, the cook Tia Nástacia, who is commanding the big feast, disappears. The accident was caused by mythological monsters who were angry about not being invited to the celebration. In order to save Tia Nástacia, the other characters from the farm decide to go back in time to the Greek Heroic Age, where they believe they will find the cook. The *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* characters explore Ancient Greece and meet several important figures of the time visiting the reign of Pericles where Dona Benta, Narizinho and Rabicó settles while the others follow their journey to Ancient Hellas where they see the Mount Olympus and meet Greek Gods and heroes.

In the 20th chapter, Pedrinho, Visconde de Sabugosa and Emília find out the whereabouts of Tia Nastácia with the help of Oracle of Delphi, who provides a riddle solved

¹² Saci Pererê is a character from Brazilian folk tale with origins in indian tribes from the south of Brazil.

by Emília – a message that the cook was captured by the Minotaur and imprisoned in the labyrinth in Crete. The Oracle also revealed that the cook was alive and safe in the hands of the monster. The trio travels to Crete with the help of the Pirlimpimpim magical powder and before exploring the labyrinth, to make sure that they would not get lost and never be able to come back, they decide together to unroll a spool of thread along their path to mark the way out of the labyrinth's aisles. When unrolling the last spool, they smell something bad coming from the monster and encounter with a big fat Minotaur holding a ball of sugar dumplings – Tia Nastácia signature dish. The cook is standing in front of the stove and, when she notices the presence of her friends, she starts crying tears of joy. After leaving the labyrinth, Tia Nastácia tells the kids everything that has happened and how she decided to cook sugar dumplings for the monster so he would not devour her. It is essentially through Tia Nastácia's perspective that the Minotaur's description is presented to the readers.

The description of the Minotaur in *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* is of a giant monster half-man with the head of a bull that gained a lot of weight due to Tia Nastácia's cooking skills. He is so passionate about the dumplings and so full of eating too much that he becomes a domesticated animal, almost harmless to the ones around him, differently from Plutarch's version where the Minotaur is ferocious and devours humans that are sent to the maze with cruelty. The Minotaur is described as a stinky monster that is sitting on his throne when the children arrive. "He does not speak, he does not answer" says Visconde, "I asked about Tia Nastácia and he just looked at me with empty eyes while chewing something out of a basket" (270, my translation¹³). However, before the sugar dumplings, he is just as intimidating with

¹³ In the original: "Não fala, não responde. Perguntei por Tia Nastácia e ele só me olhou com um olho parado, sempre a mastigar umas coisas que tira daquela cesta."

the same beastly semblance from the myth which is described by Tia Nastácia, the only one who met the monster before.

It was a giant man with the head of a bull. I was so scared I lost all my senses. . . I kneeled and I prayed for mercy with all my heart – and the animal was quiet, staring at me. . . Fortunately, his belly was already full and he left me for the next day. . . When his hunger stroke, he came, licking his lips. “My time has come”, I thought as I felt on my knees, praying. But a miracle happened. The monster saw the basket with my dumplings and tried one. Ah! The face he made! The hideous monster’s eyes shined. (272, my translation¹⁴)

As mentioned previously, the works of Lobato “stand its grounds in reframing the source-text contents and not in fully transferring a narrative created in a distant context” (Tavares 155, my translation¹⁵). In Lobato’s rendition of the myth, Theseus and Ariadne are not present in the narrative but Pedrinho and Emília might be an allusion to these significant characters in the original myth.

Also, as one of the main characteristics of children’s literature, cruelty and brutality are issues that must be avoided. In this rendition there is the use of intelligence in opposition to violence. Instead of fearing the monster, Tia Nastácia finds a clever solution to save herself from a tragic destiny and so the Minotaur becomes a calm, domesticated creature in the hands

¹⁴ In the original: “Era um homem gigante com cabeça de touro. Meu medo foi tanto que perdi os sentidos. . . Ajoelhei, rezei, pedi misericórdia com todas as palavras do meu coração - e o bicho quieto, a me olhar. . . Felizmente ele estava com a barriga cheia e me deixou para o dia seguinte. . . A fome apertou e ele vinha vindo, lambendo os beiços. “Minha hora chegou”, pensei comigo e caí no chão de joelhos, rezando pra Nossa Senhora. Mas aconteceu um milagre. O monstro viu a peneira com os bolinhos e tirou um. Provou. Ah, que cara ele fez! Aquele olhos de coisa-ruim brilharam.”

¹⁵ In the original: “o trabalho de Lobato se fundamenta na resignificação dos conteúdos do texto-fonte e não no “transporte” integral de uma narrativa produzida num contexto distante”

of the cook which illustrates the innovative aspect of Lobato's writings. Ariadne and Theseus' use of the spool to escape the labyrinth is an intelligent solution replicated by Pedrinho and Emília. However, Tia Nastácia solution introduces yet another element of intellect and astuteness in this story and it is Lobato's original contribution to the recreation of the myth.

Despite the differences between the narratives, both stories have an unquestionable exchange, although Lobato writes through a children's spectrum: he maintains what he believes to be fundamental and withdraw characteristics that are not relevant for a young audience. He is not concerned with addressing the myth in its original form, instead, he develops a way to transform the story to approach children at a young age and familiarize them with Greek mythology while creating a fun, easygoing and juvenile plot to captivate young readers.

4.3 The Minotaur in Riordan's *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief*

Similarly to Lobato, Riordan also endeavoured in creating narratives that children could easily relate to and enjoy reading. As he describes in his website, he claims he did not simplify his writings, but that he knew he had to make his narratives appropriate and interesting for his target public. *Percy Jackson* is similar to *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo's O Minotauro* because both are committed to illustrate Greek mythology through a contemporary lenses, instigating readers, children or adults, to learn. In *Percy Jackson*, Riordan drags the characters "into the modern world and make them fit into the setting of the novel" (80), says Mugijatna, Habsari and Putri. According to their article *Rick Riordan's Intention in Writing Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief and the Reception of the Readers*, a few examples of modernizing the myths are in attaching "a wheelchair to Chiron the Centaur, Hawaiian shirt

into Dionysus the God of wine, sandals and short for Poseidon the God of sea” and “glasses and biker’s looks for Ares the God of war”. (80)

In *Percy Jackson*, the story benefit from a first person point of view with Percy as the narrator, which is a technique used by Riordan, intentionally or not, to draw the readers into Percy’s world. This method shortens the distance between the story and the readers and allows them to rely on the plot creating a trustful connection with the characters in the book and the surreal situations they face.

Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief, published in 2005, is the first book of the series *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*. The protagonist, Percy, is the son of Poseidon and a mortal woman, Sally Jackson. Originally, Perseus is a demigod son of Zeus and half-brother to Heracles. In Riordan’s rendition, Percy lives in Montauk in New York with his mother until the day he discovers his identity and moves to a special Half-Blood camp to train his skills as a demigod hero. There, he connects with other half-blood children of Greek Gods, such as his best friends Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena and Grover Underwood, a satyr. Differently from Lobato’s *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* in which mythology can be found exceptionally in two volumes, the series of *Percy Jackson* is entirely based on mythological fiction and all five books revolve around Greek mythology’s imagery – the readers visit the Mount Olympus, the underworld, meet several Greek Gods and mythological figures such as Chimera, Medusa, centaurs, cyclopes among others.

It is in the first volume, *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief*, that the Minotaur appears for the first time. Later on in the series the Minotaur reappears in the last volume entitled “*The Last Olympian*” (2009). At the very start, shortly after Percy finds out about his mysterious identity, his mother, Sally Jackson and his best friend and protector, Grover

Underwood, run away together to Camp Half-Blood when they are attacked by a ferocious man-bull figure, the Minotaur. Percy manages to jump on the monster's back and pull one of its horns and stab him with a part of it. Still the monster was able to capture Sally while Percy and Grover cracked an invisible wall of protection surrounding the camp only half-bloods are allowed to infiltrate. Percy's mother was handout by the Minotaur to Hades, the God of the underworld, to hold as hostage. In the Camp Half-Blood, Percy's adventure begins – he discovers about his father, Poseidon, and that the Greek Gods are accusing him of stealing the lightning bolt. In order to save the world from a war between the Olympian Gods, Percy, Annabeth and Grover embark in an adventure to rescue the lightning bolt and save Sally.

The description of the Minotaur in *Percy Jackson* is of a creature with the head of a bull and the body of a man with fur from the belly button up and naked except for a pair of white underwear with the Fruit of the Loom's logo:

He was seven feet tall, easy, his arms and legs like something from the cover of Muscle Man magazine – bulging biceps and triceps and a bunch of other ‘ceps, all stuffed like baseballs under vein-webbed skin. He wore no clothes except underwear – I mean, bright white Fruit of the Looms – . . . His neck was a mass of muscle and fur leading up to his enormous head, which had a snout as long as my arm, snotty nostrils with a gleaming brass ring, cruel black eyes and horns – enormous black and white horns with points you just couldn't get from an electric sharpener. (50)

He is fiercer than Lobato's description of the monster the children encounter at the maze, although this version carries a satire element that provides an amusing, nearly ridiculous image of the monster – his underwear. This could be Riordan's attempt to decrease

the Minotaur's savagery in order to make it more appropriate for children, making him more 'funny' than scary and shadowing his intimidating semblance. Riordan also chooses to compare the monster to the strong bodybuilders on the cover of the fictional magazine, Muscle Man, which might as well represent his attempt in modernizing the story along with adding to the amusing picture of the monster. On the other hand, the Minotaur in this book has huge horns in his head, adding to a savage description of a monster. The characters – Percy, Grover and Sally – undoubtedly fear the Minotaur, and because it is narrated in first person, the readers witness their dread first hand. "The fear in my stomach made me want to bolt", says Percy. (52) Besides his fear, by the end of the chapter, Percy kills the Minotaur although Riordan uses words such as "The monster was gone" and "began to disintegrate like crumbling sand, blown away in chunks of the wind" (55). Therefore, there are obscure elements like death in Riordan's rendition like in Plutarch's version. Percy and Theseus are the heroes that murder the Minotaur and avenge Sally, his mother, and the people from Crete, respectively. However, in *Percy Jackson*, Riordan attempts to describe the Minotaur's death with subtle wording, while in *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo*, the Minotaur does not die at all, instead, the children trace their way out of the labyrinth with the thread, leaving the monster behind. Riordan's rendition of the myth is also very similar to Lobato's because, in being children's books, these authors are concerned with addressing Greek mythology while recreating the myths, transforming these narratives so they look more alluring to their target public.

5. Final Remarks

This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that mythology, and particularly Greek mythology, remains consistent in western literature despite

diversity of cultures and significant time gaps. As mentioned above, Plutarch's version of the myth was published in 1517, while Lobato's *O Minotauro* was published in 1939 and *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* in 2005. There are more than four hundred years between the two first renditions' publication dates and more than sixty years between the contemporary works of Lobato and Riordan. Nevertheless, the myth was still as relevant as before, and even nowadays, in 2017, these stories look more contemporary than ever. The cross-cultural and trans-historical diversity between these narratives impacted how the authors chose to depict these stories, by transforming language like Lobato, or innovating a narrative like Percy Jackson. However, what the first research question sought to demonstrate was that the essence of mythology is still valuable to be reproduced and popularized.

From primary analysis, the hypothesis, which relates to the second research question, considered that mythology endures even in modern societies because contemporary authors preserve these narratives originated from mythology in modern literature. In the case of Monteiro Lobato and Rick Riordan, the intrinsic meanings of the myth in their narratives can be even stronger because the books discussed are children's books. As mentioned above, in the review of literature, readings at this period of a child's life can play an important role in teaching morals as well as unconscious development of one's personality. By analyzing the way the character, the Minotaur, is represented in each of the narratives, through its similarities and disparities, it is possible to infer that the authors find relevant to discuss matters of morality, fear and family, for instance, while presenting the readers to Greek mythology. In this sense, the myths serve a purpose and therefore they will always be an endless source of ideas for contemporary authors.

As noted by Campbell (1991), “myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life”. He believes that “our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.” In this passage, he reinforces the idea of myths as something that defines the core of human beings as well as the importance of these myths to spark one’s inner development.

This analysis provide further support for the primary hypothesis based on the idea that these stories have the power to establish profound connections to issues of identity, coming of age, and finding one’s place in the world. These are fundamental matters in children’s literature, which aims to educate and socialize children, and also to illustrate their concerns about the world and their place in it. Considering that these are issues every human faces, mythology will forever be a reliable source of connection.

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