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Theme Analysis in the Film Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief Based on Greek Mythology

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tema-tema utama yang terdapat dalam film Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief (2010) yang diangkat dari mitologi Yunani. Film ini mengadaptasi kisah-kisah mitologi klasik dan menyajikan nilai-nilai moral serta konflik yang masih relevan dengan kehidupan remaja modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema sentral film. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dokumenter dan tinjauan pustaka, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis tematik Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan empat tema dominan dalam film: identitas dan penemuan jati diri, persahabatan dan kesetiaan, konflik kebaikan versus kejahatan, serta kepahlawanan dan pengorbanan. Tema-tema ini merepresentasikan nilai-nilai moral mitologi Yunani yang diadaptasi ke dalam konteks kehidupan modern. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada studi sastra modern dan adaptasi mitologi klasik di media populer. Berbeda dengan penelitian sebelumnya yang berfokus pada analisis karakter dan plot dalam adaptasi film mitologi, penelitian ini secara khusus mengkaji struktur tematik dan pesan moral film menggunakan pendekatan analisis tematik Miles & Huberman. Hal ini menawarkan perspektif baru dalam memahami bagaimana mitologi klasik ditafsirkan ulang dalam budaya populer kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Mitologi Yunani, Adaptasi Film, Analisis Tematik*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the main themes found in the film *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010) based on Greek mythology. The film adapts classical mythological stories and presents moral values and conflicts that remain relevant to modern teenage life. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method using thematic analysis to identify the central themes of the film. Data were collected through documentary observation and literature review, then analyzed using the thematic analysis model by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña. The results of the study reveal four dominant themes in the movie: identity and self-discovery, friendship and loyalty, the conflict of good versus evil, and heroism and sacrifice. These themes represent the moral values of Greek mythology adapted into the context of modern life. The findings are expected to contribute to the study of modern literature and classical mythology adaptation in popular media. Unlike previous studies that focused on character and plot analysis in mythological film adaptations, this research specifically examines the film's thematic structure and moral messages using a thematic analysis approach by Miles & Huberman. This offers a fresh perspective in understanding how classical mythology is reinterpreted in contemporary popular culture.

Keywords: *Greek Mythology, Film Adaptation, Thematic Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

The movie *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010) is one of the modern literary works in the form of a movie that adapts classical Greek mythology into a contemporary narrative. Directed by Chris Columbus, the movie tells the story of a teenager named Percy Jackson who discovers he is the son of the sea god, Poseidon, and goes on an epic adventure involving various mythological figures and creatures. Since its release, the movie has earned USD 226 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, 2022), proving the high enthusiasm for mythological adaptations in popular media.

The adaptation of Greek mythology in modern works such as this film is important to study because mythology is not only a rich source of stories, but also represents cultural, moral, and philosophical values that remain relevant today (Morford & Lenardon, 2018; Hardwick, 2016). Greek mythology has been widely used in various forms of modern literature and film as a reflection of social reality, morality, and identity crisis in the era of globalization.

The study of the theme in this movie is important because the theme is the core of the message that a literary work wants to convey. Themes can describe social realities, moral conflicts, and universal values raised by authors or filmmakers (Nurgiyantoro, 2010; Abrams, 1999). In addition, film as a form of modern literature has a strategic role in spreading cultural values and building moral awareness through visual media that is easily accessible to the

wider community (Bordwell & Thompson, 2016).

This research is focused on identifying and analyzing the main themes that appear in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. In contrast to previous studies that mostly examine the characters or storylines of mythological film adaptations, this study specifically analyzes the main themes using a systematic thematic analysis approach. This study is expected to make a new contribution to the study of Greek mythology adaptation in popular media and enrich academic discourse in the fields of language, modern literature, and popular culture.

In today's digital era, the popularity of mythological adaptations in films reflects not only audience interest in fantasy genres but also their need for moral narratives that resonate with modern issues such as identity crisis, social loyalty, and moral dilemmas. This phenomenon highlights the importance of analyzing how classical values are reconstructed in contemporary popular media.

The formulation of the problems in this study are: "What are the main themes in the movie *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*?". The purpose of this research is to analyze and interpret the main themes contained in the film. The results of this study are expected to be a reference for the development of modern literary studies, especially in analyzing the adaptation of classical mythology into the medium of film.

Literature Review

A. Theme in Literature

Theme is the main idea in a literary work that becomes the basis for story development (Nurgiyantoro, 2010). According to Abrams (1999), theme is a universal message that the author wants to convey through the work of art, either explicitly or implicitly. In modern literary studies, theme not only functions as a narrative foundation, but also as a reflection of social and cultural values that develop in society (Riffaterre, 2007). Tyson (2006) emphasizes that theme analysis needs to be done with a critical approach to capture deeper meanings and be relevant to current phenomena. A study by Kartika (2019) showed that thematic analysis is able to map identity issues and moral conflicts in contemporary literary works. Therefore, in this study, thematic analysis becomes the main instrument to understand the moral messages contained in the movie *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. Among several thematic analysis models, Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña's framework is considered the most suitable for this study due to its systematic and flexible data display, which allows for a clear categorization of recurring themes in narrative-based data such as film scripts and scenes.

B. Greek Mythology in Modern Literature

Greek mythology has been a source of inspiration in various forms of modern literature and art, including novels, films, and theater (Morford & Lenardon, 2018). The adaptation of classical mythology into contemporary works is not just about reproducing stories, but also recontextualizing myths to fit current values and social issues (Segal, 2004; Hardwick, 2016). Buxton (2009) explains that Greek myths provide a flexible narrative framework for exploring universal themes such as heroism, the search for identity, and moral conflict. In a study conducted by Leighton (2014), mythological adaptations in modern films play an important role in introducing classical culture to younger generations. This research uses this approach to examine how the movie *Percy Jackson* modifies mythological stories without losing the original moral values.

C. Film as a Modern Literary Work

Film has been recognized as a form of modern literature that combines narrative, visual, and symbolic elements in conveying messages (Bordwell & Thompson, 2016). Monaco (2009) states that the film analysis approach needs to examine not only technical aspects such as cinematography, but also the narrative structure and themes raised. In the context of mythological adaptation, film becomes an effective medium for transforming traditional stories into aesthetic and reflective experiences that are relevant to modern popular culture (Stam, 2000). Research conducted by Mugijatna, Habsari, & Putri (2022) reinforces that mythological adaptation films not only function as entertainment, but also as a means of inheriting cultural values. Therefore, this study places films as modern literary texts that deserve to be analyzed through a thematic approach.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it is suitable for analyzing complex social and cultural phenomena such as the representation of themes in films based on Greek mythology. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the meanings and cultural values presented in films (Creswell, 2016; Moleong, 2019).

Types and Sources of Data

The data in this research consists of:

1. Primary data in the form of dialog, scenes, symbols, and narratives in the film *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010).

2. Secondary data in the form of literary theory books, national journal articles and previous research relevant to the theme, mythology theory, and film studies as modern literary works.

Data Collection Technique

Data is obtained through:

- Documentary observation by watching the film intensively and recording scenes, dialog, and mythological elements.
- Literature study of books and journals such as Morford & Lenardon (2007), Nurgiyantoro (2010), Abrams (1999), Bordwell & Thompson (2008), and mythology articles from Classical Journal and Journal of Modern Literature.
- Documentation was in the form of systematic recording of observation data.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis model with stages according to Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014):

1. Data reduction: Selecting relevant data in the form of scenes and dialog related to mythological themes.
2. Data display: Presenting data in theme category tables and narrative descriptions.
3. Conclusion drawing/verification: Drawing conclusions on emerging theme patterns and verifying them with theories and previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Identity and Self-Discovery

This theme is central to the plot of Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief. Percy, who initially feels alien to his world, discovers that he is the son of Poseidon, the god of the sea in Greek mythology. Percy's journey of self-discovery is shown through key scenes, such as his conversation with the Oracle of Delphi who states, "You shall go west, and face the god who has turned." (Columbus, 2010). (Columbus, 2010). In addition, according to Leighton (2014), the search for identity in this movie is not only personal but also a reflection on the position of modern adolescents facing the burden of ancient traditions and values. Another important scene that emphasizes this theme occurs when Percy first enters Camp Half-Blood and faces rejection from other demigods who doubt his abilities and lineage. This situation represents Percy's internal struggle in accepting his true identity as a demigod and the son of Poseidon. Such conflicts mirror the psychological battles faced by teenagers in contemporary society as they search for belonging and personal meaning. Morford & Lenardon (2018) explain that mythological narratives often function as metaphors for human

experiences, especially those related to identity formation. The film successfully portrays this universal conflict, making ancient mythological ideas relevant to modern youth.

B. Friendship and Loyalty

Friendship is Percy's main strength in dealing with conflict. His relationships with Annabeth and Grover become the moral foundation throughout the story. In one scene, Grover is willing to risk his life to save Percy. Yulianti (2023) notes that friendship in this movie represents the collective value that goes against the individualistic nature of modern culture. This finding is consistent with Tyson's (2006) argument that contemporary literary works often reinterpret classical collective values to suit modern social expectations, emphasizing the importance of solidarity in individualistic societies. The importance of friendship and loyalty is also depicted in the scene where Percy risks his life to save Annabeth from Medusa. This act of bravery not only shows his loyalty but also highlights how friendship can become a driving force in overcoming fear and adversity. Yulianti (2023) emphasizes that mythological heroes frequently rely on loyal companions to survive their perilous journeys. In modern contexts, this reflects the role of peer support systems in adolescent social life, where solidarity can provide strength in difficult situations. The film reinforces this value by portraying how mutual trust and sacrifice among friends lead to the success of their quest.

C. The Conflict of Good vs Evil

This classic theme is present through the conflict between Percy and Luke, the treacherous son of Hermes. Luke wants to bring down the gods, continuing the ambitions of Kronos in Greek mythology. The confrontation on Olympus emphasizes the difference in principles between the protagonist and the antagonist. Hikmat (2012) states that this opposition reflects the eternal conflict between morality and destructive ambition. This theme is further illustrated in the confrontation between Percy and Luke, where Luke reveals his betrayal and ambition to overthrow the gods. The scene underlines the film's core moral message about the consequences of greed and the misuse of power. According to Tyson (2006), mythological narratives often dramatize the struggle between good and evil not only as external conflicts but also as internal moral dilemmas. Luke's character represents the temptation to choose selfishness over duty, a conflict that remains relevant in both mythological and modern settings. This interpretation enriches the film's narrative by showing that the battle between good and evil is not only about physical confrontation but also about moral choices.

D. Heroism and Sacrifice

Heroism in this movie is not only about physical courage, but also sacrifice. Percy is willing to face danger in order to save his mother and maintain the balance of the world of the gods, Mugijatna, Habsari, & Putri (2022) mentioned that the theme of sacrifice in this adaptation is a reinterpretation of the value of classical Greek heroism in a modern context. In addition to Percy's confrontation with Hades, another significant moment demonstrating heroism and sacrifice occurs when Percy willingly offers the lightning bolt to Zeus without seeking personal gain. This act exemplifies the mythological hero's trait of prioritizing the greater good over personal ambition. Leighton (2014) asserts that classical heroes are often characterized by their readiness to make difficult decisions for the welfare of others. By including this scene, the film conveys the message that true heroism involves not only physical bravery but also moral integrity, a lesson highly applicable to young audiences today as they navigate ethical challenges in their own lives.

E. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Film Adaptation

One of the strengths of *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* as a film adaptation lies in its ability to make classical Greek mythology accessible to modern audiences, particularly teenagers. By simplifying complex mythological narratives into a contemporary adventure storyline, the film successfully introduces mythological characters and moral values without overwhelming the audience with complicated names, genealogies, and historical contexts. In addition, the visual and cinematic effects help visualize legendary figures such as Poseidon, Hades, and Medusa, allowing viewers to experience ancient stories in an entertaining and engaging manner. This aligns with Leighton's (2014) statement that modern film adaptations serve as an effective medium for cultural preservation through entertaining storytelling.

However, the film adaptation also has weaknesses. One of the most notable is the simplification of mythological conflicts and moral dilemmas into straightforward good-versus-evil narratives. In doing so, the film often omits the complex philosophical debates and moral ambiguities that are central to classical Greek mythology. For example, conflicts between gods and humans in the original myths often explore themes of fate, free will, and divine justice, which are largely absent in the film. Tyson (2006) argued that such oversimplifications risk reducing classical literature's cultural and philosophical significance. This simplification also affects character development, where figures like Percy and Luke are depicted in overly dichotomous roles, leaving little room for moral complexity.

Despite these limitations, the film adaptation still contributes positively to popularizing mythological narratives among young audiences. Its ability to balance educational content with entertainment value is a strength that allows mythological stories to remain relevant in modern culture. This aspect provides opportunities for further studies to explore how contemporary film adaptations balance narrative fidelity with audience accessibility and commercial appeal.

To make the findings clearer and more systematic, the identified themes are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Theme Categories in the Film

No.	Theme	Description	
1.	Identity and Self-Discovery	Percy's search for his true identity as Poseidon's son	
2.	Friendship and Loyalty	Strong friendship bonds with Annabeth and Grover	
3.	Good vs Evil	Conflict between Percy and Luke representing moral opposition	
4.	Heroism and Sacrifice	Percy's bravery and selflessness for his loved ones	

Furthermore, while the film effectively presents classical mythological values in a way that is accessible to modern audiences, it also tends to simplify certain mythological narratives for the sake of entertainment. This simplification, although making the story easier to follow, might reduce the complexity of moral and philosophical messages embedded in the original myths. According to Tyson (2006), contemporary adaptations often reinterpret classical themes to suit modern social realities, sometimes losing the depth of ancient moral values. In the case of *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, although the main themes are successfully adapted, some essential mythological elements are reduced to basic character conflicts. This aspect provides an opportunity for further research to analyze how such simplifications affect the audience's understanding and appreciation of classical mythology, especially among younger generations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of thematic analysis of the movie *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), it can be concluded that there are four main dominant themes, namely self-discovery, friendship and loyalty, the opposition of good and evil, and heroism and sacrifice. These themes reflect the values of Greek mythology adapted to the context of modern life and the experiences of teenagers today. The movie not only provides adventure entertainment, but also conveys moral and cultural messages that are relevant in the contemporary world.

The findings show that the adaptation of classical mythology in modern literary works, especially films, can serve as an effective medium to introduce ancient cultural values and myths to today's generation in an interesting and easy-to-understand way. Therefore, further studies are needed to examine other aspects such as character, symbolism, and representation of mythology in other modern films based on Greek mythology or mythology from other cultures. Furthermore, this study contributes to the academic discourse on modern literary studies by offering a thematic perspective on mythological film adaptations, which has received limited attention in Indonesian academic publications. It is expected to inspire further research on the adaptation of classical

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