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Mythological References in *Harry Potter* *and the Philosopher's Stone*

When the first novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (hereafter referred to as *Philosopher's Stone*) was released in Britain, it was a great success and almost all children in Britain, it seems, read the novel and loved it. This reaction was not surprising, since the story is about wizards and witches in a fantasy world where good is at war with evil. More surprisingly, however, was the fact that adults appeared to enjoy the novel as much as children. Indeed the publisher even had a special cover made for the adult version so that their book would not be recognized in public places such as trains. This phenomenon was repeated wherever the book was subsequently published. The question which underlies my analysis is 'what is it in the novel that makes adults enjoy it so much'?

This essay claims that one reason why adults enjoy reading the novel is that the events, characters and creatures in the story are not purely fictional; some of them relate to ancient mythology from different cultures. It will focus on identifying, with the aid of close reading, those events, characters and creatures that are related to Greek mythology, comparing the novel's references and its mythological equivalents. Occasional reference is also made to Norse mythology and legends, where relevant. When adults read the novel they notice something they recognize from earlier in life, having read or heard about myths in school or from their own reading. As illusions, Greek myths add an extra dimension to the story. Children enjoy the novel on one level, focusing on the fantasy world at Hogwarts, while adults enjoy it on another level where the mythological references, if understood, give a deeper meaning to the reading.

In *Philosopher's Stone* there are numerous references to ancient mythologies. According to Joseph Campbell, 'the world's foremost authority on mythology' (Betty Sue Flowers, Ed.), when people think of mythology, 'they usually think either of the Greek mythology or of the biblical mythology' (Campbell, *Myth*, 71). In accordance to his statement this essay will focus on references to Greek mythology beginning with the dog Fluffy and the underground

beneath Hogwarts. It will then address the occurrence of the magic numbers of three and seven and the Philosopher's stone. Finally, it will relate characters like Harry Potter, Professor Dumbledore, Voldemort, Hermione and Professor Minerva McGonagall to the mythology. Furthermore, to show that mythologies throughout the world have parallels, occasional reference is made to Norse mythology, where relevant.

Campbell gives prominence to the fact that young people today must make up their own myths, since people no longer read or talk about ancient myths; there is no comparable literature to take its place, and hence young people have difficulties understanding the world that is beyond what is seen (Campbell, *Hero*, 4, 8). According to Campbell, myths provide guidance, teaching young people about their own life and offer life models. However, 'the models must be appropriate to the time in which they are living' (Campbell, *Hero*, 4, 11, 13) that is, the models must 'be up to date', modernized to match today's life of young people. This essay will show that J.K. Rowling's novel *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels are to be seen as updated, modernized versions of ancient myths, and as such they provide guidance, teach young people about their lives and offer life models. The same can be said for Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* and films like *Star Wars* by George Lucas. In modern IT society, where everything happens 'at the click of a button', it is difficult to catch the attention of children who want action. The Harry Potter novels fulfil this need by providing action and supernatural events.

The wording of the British novel's title infers that there is a connecting link to ancient mythology; where the belief is that the Philosopher's stone offers the prospect of eternal life, which is what Voldemort hungers for. Furthermore, the expression 'philosopher' is the ancient term for today's scientist (Highfield, 275-76). The British title is therefore used throughout this essay. The search for 'eternal life' is a continuous process in today's society where eternal youth and/or life is sought and exposed in media through the images of for

instance filmstars, musicians and models, and thereby the reference is familiar to the adult reader. There are similarities between the novel's stone and its ancient equivalent, as illustrated above. However, in *Philosopher's Stone* Harry looks into the Mirror of Erised, sees how his reflection pulls out a blood-red stone from its pocket, puts it back and 'as it did so, Harry felt something heavy drop into his real pocket. Somehow ... *he'd got the stone*' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 314). It has, in fact, the shape of a stone, while in ancient myths the Philosopher's stone is most often referred to as an elixir under names such as e.g. 'nectar of deathlessness' or 'drinkable gold' (Campbell, Hero, 165; Highfield, 278) and as 'rejuvenating apples' in Norse mythology (Simek, 172). The reason why it is in the shape of a stone in the novel is here understood as being an image of the name in the title, *Philosopher's stone*.

When Harry has arrived at Hogwarts the next recognizable reference to mythology, for readers with some knowledge about myths, appears. In the Great Hall the pupils are told by Professor Dumbledore, the Headmaster, that they should not enter the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side, if they do not want to die a painful death (*Philosopher's Stone*, 139). This statement awakes the curiosity of the Hogwarts pupils and stimulates the fantasy of the reader. Why are they not supposed to enter that floor? What is concealed in that corridor? The answer is provided when Harry and his friends accidentally find themselves in the forbidden corridor, facing a monstrous three-headed dog, drooling from all three mouths, standing on a trapdoor as if guarding it (175). They later find out that the dog's name is Fluffy, and that it belongs to Hagrid but why it has three heads is not stated explicitly, though hinted at by Hagrid who 'bought him off a Greek chappie' in the pub (209). The expression 'Greek chappie' is a clue which, if understood, leads the reader to Greek mythology.

In Greek mythology the three-headed dog, named Cerberus is a monster with a dragon for a tail. It guards the gates to Hades, the kingdom of the dead situated in the underworld. Cerberus is supposed to keep all living creatures away and all dead creatures down in the

underworld (Stiessel, 6), which is what Fluffy does in the novel. There are similarities between Fluffy and Cerberus; both have three heads and guard the entrance to the underground/underworld, but there are also differences such as the tail, where Fluffy has a dog's tail but Cerberus has a dragon for a tail. The underworld guarded by Cerberus is inhabited by dead people, while the underground beneath Hogwarts has no dead. Cerberus is also more dangerous than Fluffy because of his vomit, from which the deadly plant 'Aconite' springs, according to ancient myth (Highfield, 237). There is, however, a reference to the plant in *Philosopher's Stone*; Professor Snape teaches about its poisonous effects on humans, which will lead to death. When adults read about Fluffy and make the connection to Cerberus in Greek mythology, they find something that they can relate to in the novel. The plant named Aconite is also a reference to Greek mythology and furthermore, that plant can be found in today's gardens, still with its poisonous effects (<http://linnaeus>). Having found one reference to mythology in the novel, the observant reader can now find even more references such as the underground beneath the trapdoor.

Having recognized the connection between Fluffy and the mythological Cerberus, the adult reader becomes aware of the underworld and a new question evolves: What is beneath the trapdoor at Hogwarts, and how can it be related to Hades? There is a connection between the two, but to discover this, Fluffy must be passed. The reader is reminded of the 'Greek chappie' when Hagrid tells the children that they just have to 'play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight ter sleep' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 287). Now they know how to calm the dog; they are able to reach the trapdoor and they have also figured out what is hidden beneath it, the Philosopher's stone. They play a flute to make the dog fall asleep. They then open the trapdoor only to find darkness and 'no way of climbing down ... no sign of the bottom' (297). They have to jump down into the darkness without knowing what awaits them.

The 'Greek chappie', who is the salesman of Fluffy and knows how to put it to sleep, is here compared with Orpheus. According to the myth, Orpheus plays on his lyre to put Cerberus to sleep so that he can bring back his wife from the kingdom of the dead, Hades (Lindskog, 134). Just like Orpheus, Harry and his two friends have to go down into the underground, although they are going for the Philosopher's stone and instead of a lyre they play a flute. Orpheus leaves the world above, of the living, and Harry, Hermione and Ron also leave the world of the living, which in their case is Hogwarts. The reality of the novel, through these events and creatures, shows to have equivalents in the Greek mythology. As a consequence, the reader can now come to the conclusion that the trapdoor at Hogwarts must lead to a place that can be related to Hades, which comes from Greek myths.

Harry, Hermione and Ron jump down without hesitation knowing that they have to get hold of the stone before the evil forces get to it 'we must be miles under the school ... the passageway sloped downwards ...' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 298-300). When they land they are in fact deep beneath Hogwarts, and having met 'Cerberus' and put him to sleep with music (as did Orpheus) the underground beneath Hogwarts is here thought of as the equivalence to Hades. In Hades the dead were judged by three gods, whether to be punished or sent to the divine land of the dead (Goldhill, 146). Harry and his friends have to solve a number of tasks (of which more later) to get to the stone, which here correspond to being judged in Hades. They are tested, to see if they are worthy of finding the stone; they are being judged by their capacity to perform every commission. Incapacity to perform the commissions is a punishable offence and they risk not being able to return back up to 'the divine land' of Hogwarts.

Campbell claims that mythologies throughout the world have parallels (Campbell, Hero, xxi-xxii), that is, the themes are similar although the characters do not look alike. In for example the Norse mythology there is also a monster dog, Garm, who guards the kingdom of the dead, 'Hel', just like the Greek Cerberus and the novel's Fluffy, though Garm only has

one head. The parallels here are the guarding dogs, even though they do not look alike, and the presence of the kingdom of the dead. Also when it comes to the theme there are parallels; in Norse mythology the episode where someone goes down into the underworld to bring back a loved one, can be referred to the myth where Hermod, son of Oden, goes down to bring back his brother Balder (Grönbech, 108-109). The themes are similar, but there is one difference in *Philosopher's Stone*; there are no dead beneath Hogwarts. Should Ron, Hermione or Harry fail in their mission, they will be trapped in the underground or, in the worst case scenario, even killed. This danger is the adult reader aware of, if knowing about the Greek myths or even the Norse myths. As the adult reader becomes more attentive to other mythological references in *Philosopher's Stone*, he/she is able to have the young child attend to these references as well and discuss them. It is not just another fictitious novel about supernatural events, but a novel with a deeper meaning, which gives a stimulus to the reader's mind and the possibility of a common and more profound reading experience.

The number 'three' appears several times in *Philosopher's Stone* and the number is believed holy and mythical. The first time the triad becomes obvious to the reader is in the meeting with Fluffy, the three-headed dog, who guards the trapdoor to the underground. Dogs like that are not common in today's society but above all the meeting arouses memories and the reader, as a result, reflects on more situations where the number three appears; Fluffy is found in the forbidden corridor on the third floor, there are three friends (Harry, Hermione and Ron) working together against the evil forces trying to find the stone, the rites of passage (of which more later) and there are three rings in the game Quidditch, to mention just a few.

There are close points of similarity between *Philosopher's Stone* and mythology regarding the number 'three' and its usage. In myths 'three' is the number of divinity (<http://runeberg>, 370) for example the three Gods, moreover brothers, Zeus, Poseidon and Hades who ruled three empires respectively. The first uneven number and the first even number make the sum

of three (http:runeberg, 370), here interpreted as Harry being alone but he meets two friends at Hogwarts; Harry is ‘the chosen one’ who will meet and conquer Voldemort, Hermione is the leader in charm spells and logic, and Ron is the leader in playing chess. The number, as a rule, represents a totality; a beginning, middle and an end, and is often used in expressions such as ‘all good things come in threes’ (http:runeberg, 370); for those readers who think about biblical myths, the number is found for example in ‘the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Danell, 63). The number is also found in fairy tales where the protagonist for example makes three wishes or the hero has to solve three tasks. In addition to the number ‘three’ also the number ‘seven’ is mythical and found in *Philosopher’s Stone*.

In the game Quidditch there are seven players and in ancient mythology they knew of seven planets which gave names to the days of the week (Dahlby, 204-05). The interpretation is here that the seven players, flying high above the ground (earth), represent the seven planets from mythology. The number appears on even more occasions such as the seven tasks, or obstacles, which must be solved by Harry and his two friends in order to gain the Philosopher’s stone; the three-headed dog, the Devil’s Snare, the flying keys, the huge Chessboard, the Troll, the seven bottles of potion and the Mirror of Erised. The seven obstacles are manufactured by the six Professors; Sprout, Flitwick, McGonagall, Quirrell, Snape and Dumbledore and also Hagrid, the gamekeeper, a total of seven people who are here interpreted as the equivalents of ‘the seven wise’ in Greek mythology (http:runeberg, 371). The seven obstacles demand a high level of proficiency from Harry and his friends, in respect of ingenuity, intelligence and bravery to master the difficulties, as illustrated below.

The first task is to pass the three-headed dog, which guards the trapdoor that leads to the Philosopher’s stone, and who falls asleep when played to, provided by Hagrid (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 209, 297). To solve this, Harry and his friends ‘only’ have to play on the flute. Professor Sprout, the teacher of Herbology, is responsible for the second obstacle, the Devil’s

Snare, which can be killed with light and warmth (298-99). This obstacle calls for a charm and the use of the wand, which Hermione knows how to use. The third obstacle is the flying keys which are produced by Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, and look like 'jewel-bright birds' (300-01). To solve this, they use the available broomsticks and since 'the boy's a natural' (165) Harry has no problem in catching the right key. These first three obstacles are easily solved by Harry and his friends, however, the following four obstacles demand their complete concentration and competence.

Professor McGonagall, teacher of Transfiguration, is the constructor of the fourth obstacle the huge Chessboard, where Ron, who is the best of the chess players, steps up and takes the lead; he guides them, as well as the other chessmen, through the game and on to the next door. Ron sacrifices himself for the other two in order to reach their goal, the Philosopher's stone (302-05). The teacher of Defense Against the Dark Arts, Professor Quirrell, contributes with a Troll even larger than the one they had met earlier; this is the fifth obstacle, although the troll is already defeated when they arrive, thus they do not have to use their own powers (306). The sixth obstacle is supplied by Professor Snape, the Potion teacher, and consists of seven bottles of potion, where Harry and Hermione have to figure out which two are not poisonous; Hermione, being both intelligent and logical, comes up with the solution (306-09). Last but not least, Professor Dumbledore, the Headmaster, provides the Mirror of Erised. This is the seventh and final obstacle which Harry has to face on his own in his search for the Philosopher's stone (311). If, and when, all seven tasks are solved they are worthy of the stone, and they will return to 'the divine land' of Hogwarts with the Philosopher's stone in their possession. It is important that Harry and his friends overcome the seven obstacles and when they are finished, it is 'in full numbers'; which is what number 'seven' also stands for (Dahlby, 205). Throughout the world the numbers of three and seven are still used in everyday life, such as the expressions 'sevenfold' or 'in seventh heaven', though often

without people being aware of their ancient, or for that matter biblical signification. In *Philosopher's Stone* it is important that Harry solves the final task finding the stone, if being a hero equivalent to Greek heroes.

In the beginning of *Philosopher's Stone*, Harry is told he is famous and has been so since he was an infant. He is considered, in the world of sorcerers, to be a hero; his time at Hogwarts provides him with the knowledge and guidance he needs as a wizard, to live up to expectations. So far the theme of the novel is accurate according to the description of 'myth', which says that it is a tale about things that are supernatural, as in the Greek myths of heroes, and continues to be told in 'tales' ever after (Plus dictionary, 733). However, does Harry correspond to the heroes in Greek mythology and if so, in what way? The following analysis will give an answer to these questions and discuss whether *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels are tales of supernatural things and heroes, equivalent to Greek myths.

In Greek mythology a hero is usually born of a human woman and a god – Harry's mother Lily was a muggler and his father was a wizard, here compared to a god. The hero in Greek myths fights monsters – Harry fights Voldemort, here equivalent to a monster. The hero is, in Greek myths, worshipped by the ordinary man – Harry is already famous when he arrives at Hogwarts due to his first encounter with Voldemort (Goldhill, 126). In the introduction of the novel, Harry's parents are killed by Voldemort; when he tries to kill Harry the magic spell leaves a mark on Harry's forehead but the young boy survives the attack, after which he is referred to as 'the boy who survived'. The comparison between Harry and the description of Greek heroes indicates that he is qualified to be thought of as the hero in *Philosopher's Stone*, which is of great importance if the novel is to replace the ancient myths. There are, however, more criteria that need to be fulfilled if to be called a hero, in accordance with ancient myths, as will be shown in the following analysis.

Joseph Campbell has noted a similar pattern in other cultures regarding the hero; he may look different but appears in similar circumstances e.g. the Greek hero Jason, more modern heroes like Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings* and Harry Potter. His observations are summed up as ‘A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man’ (Campbell, Hero, 28). Whether or not the description given in the quotation above is in accordance with Harry’s life will be discussed henceforward.

Harry’s life is rather boring, together with the Dursleys’; he is unaware of his importance (having survived the meeting with Voldemort) and of his powers, that is, Harry’s ‘world of common day’. Harry is brought to his relatives, the Dursleys’, after his parents are killed, and they never tell him about whom he really is, they try to deny it to keep him from being ‘abnormal’ (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 63). Then Harry is summoned to Hogwarts which represents ‘a region of supernatural wonder’; where anything and everything happens whether it is to fly on a broomstick or talk to old wizard ghosts, casting spells or study the History of Magic.

At Hogwarts, Harry is taught to become a skilled wizard and to successfully confront evil forces; which refers to ‘fabulous forces are there encountered’ and in the beginning, all of this takes place at Hogwarts. ‘A decisive victory is won’; Harry does win every confrontation with Voldemort and other evil forces although most often with the help of his friends. He comes back victorious and people are saved from destruction. The final part of the quotation ‘the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man’ is thereby fulfilled in *Philosopher’s Stone* and the subsequent novels, where Harry conquers evil forces and ultimately Voldemort, and the world is saved. During his whole upbringing he is protected by the mighty wizard Dumbledore, but also helped by Ron

and Hermione. There are consequently many indications that Harry is qualified to be thought of as an equivalent to the Greek heroes. With this in mind, Harry bears comparison with the Greek hero Jason, as will be illustrated below, after a short briefing of Jason's life.

The journey of the archetype 'the hero', Campbell states, is divided into three stages or passages; separation, initiation and return. Within each of these three stages there are characteristic themes (Campbell, Hero, 28) and Harry's experiences of life as a hero are in many ways similar to those of the Greek hero Jason. Jason is brought up in secret up in the mountains (separation). When he has become an adult he reclaims his kingdom but is assigned a mission; he has to fetch the Golden Skin (initiation) and in doing so, he faces many evil forces but comes back having completed the mission (return). When facing danger on his mission, he is protected by the goddess Hera, but also by Athena goddess of combat and Medea skilled in the art of witchcraft (Linders, 191; Willis, 28). To show the correspondence between 'the hero' Harry and the Greek hero Jason, a closer comparison is illustrated as follows and through this comparison it is shown that *Philosopher's Stone* can replace ancient myths as a tale about things that are supernatural, as in the Greek myths of heroes.

Harry as well as Jason is taken from his original environment (separation); Harry is brought to the Dursleys' after the parents' death and Jason away from his father up into the mountains. Harry is, at the age of eleven, brought to Hogwarts where he is taught to become a skilled wizard; he successfully confronts evil forces and becomes a 'strong' wizard. Jason, in his turn, is brought up to become a strong young man, able to reclaim his kingdom and in doing so faces many evil forces (initiation). They both come back (return) and both are protected by a powerful protector: Harry by the greatest wizard Dumbledore, and Jason by the goddess Hera.

Harry is also helped by Ron who, in this interpretation, corresponds to Athena; skillful in strategy and tactical thinking, which also applies to Ron as a chess player. Furthermore, Harry

is helped by Hermione who corresponds to Medea, skillful in the art of witchcraft, which also applies to Hermione for example when ‘killing’ the Devil’s Snare. Although living in different times (modern vs. ancient) and cultures Harry’s and Jason’s lives are similar and they are both heroes. Whether *Philosopher’s Stone* is a ‘tale’ that corresponds to the Greek myths of heroes is hereby confirmed; the novel, as well as the sequels, is a modern version of the ancient tales about heroes. However, the hero in Greek myths could have two personalities, a good side and an evil side (Goldhill, 147), and this is what Harry fears, as illustrated below.

In *Philosopher’s Stone* Harry is ‘marked’ by Voldemort in their first encounter, when Harry is just an infant; as a memento he has a scar on his forehead in the shape of a bolt lightning (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 22). Through the scar Harry is affected by Voldemort’s evil qualities; not just by the scar but a part of Voldemort’s psyche penetrated into Harry (Colbert, 144). This is the reason why the Sorting Hat is irresolute whether to place Harry in the house of Slytherin or the house of Gryffindor ‘Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind, either. There’s talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that’s interesting ...So where shall I put you?’ (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 133). Harry fears being an evil person and thought ‘Not Slytherin, not Slytherin’ (133); duly noted by the Hat ‘Not Slytherin, eh? ...Well if you’re sure – better be GRYFFINDOR!’ (133). The Sorting Hat gives in to Harry’s wish and places him in the house of Gryffindor.

The attentive reader takes note of that Harry has a somewhat aggressive side to his personality; he is ready to ‘pick up a fight’ both now and then and he also expresses hatred towards Dudley Dursley but even more so towards Draco Malfoy (*Philosopher’s Stone*, 121, 157, 159). Is this what the reader wants from the hero? Even though he is equivalent with the mythical hero as illustrated above, is he believable as such to the reader? The great success of the novel throughout the world, regardless of the reader’s age, points to Harry being accepted and popular regardless of his shortcomings, and why this is a fact is discussed as follows.

Harry is aware of his reactions and also of the presence of something evil, because of his scar in which he feels a sharp, hot pain from time to time (138, 277). Gradually he becomes aware of the circumstances in which this happens, which is when Voldemort is nearby. The fear of becoming evil like Voldemort is even stronger, when he realizes that he, as well as Voldemort, has the ability to speak to snakes (Chamber of Secrets). Harry is calmed though, by Dumbledore and told that the presence of Voldemort within his mind will help Harry understand Voldemort, which will be an advantage. Harry also shows many positive qualities of which one is being a good friend who stands by his comrade Neville Longbottom and helps him acquire a stronger self-confidence (*Philosopher's Stone*, 236).

The advantage of illustrating these two personalities, equivalent to Greek myths but also to human kind, in *Philosopher's Stone* is that the reader regardless of age recognizes that Harry is also very human, though being the hero in the story. His role as the hero does not patronize the reader but illustrates that every person does both good and bad things, and are nevertheless able to turn out as good people. Harry's personality is trustworthy and accepted by the reader. The presence of yet another type of heroes, which contribute to the novel being well worth reading and facilitates 'a willing suspension of disbelief' with the reader (Lukens, 19), are the characters Hermione and Ron.

The other type of hero in *Philosopher's Stone* is the one who stands by his or her friend through fair and foul, and this description matches up to Ron and Hermione. Ron is scared but says '...you don't think we'd let you go alone?' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 292). He is determined to help Harry out and in doing so he sacrifices himself '... his face pale but determined' when playing chess (305). Hermione is equally scared but she says 'How do you think you'd get to the Stone without us? ...We're coming' (292, 296). She even prepares herself, looking through her books for something useful. She is the one who figures out which two bottles of potion are not poisonous and because of that, Harry is able to move on towards the stone.

Ron's and Hermione's behavior show the reader, regardless of age, that everyone can be a hero just being a good friend, doing everything in their power to help out. For young people this serve as an excellent guidance how to behave to be regarded as trustworthy friends, a guidance which applies to ancient myths as do the reference to the 'the old man' Dumbledore.

The concept of 'the old man' according to CG Jung, stands for the archetype 'the wise old man's archetype' and he continues 'the magician and the wise old man are synonymous ... he is an immortal demoniacal being ... the illuminating, the teacher and the master' (Jung, 147-48). All of this applies to the character Professor Dumbledore, in *Philosopher's Stone*, who is very important to Harry. When Harry's parents are killed, Dumbledore steps in and watches over him, looks after him, makes sure Harry is all right. When Harry arrives at school, Dumbledore offers his support, gives some good advice and comforts Harry when needed, though tries to keep in the background as much as possible. Dumbledore is an old man who has great experience of life and is therefore a person to turn to when in trouble, which shows to the readers the importance and value of having someone older to go to for help and guidance. Dumbledore too, as 'the old man' has his equivalent in Greek mythology?

The description given in *Philosopher's Stone* of Professor Dumbledore reads; a very old man with long silvery hair and beard; he wears a long cloak and robe and is the greatest wizard of modern times (*Philosopher's Stone*, 15, 114). His appearance resembles that of Zeus, the greatest god in ancient Greece, described as an imposing man with a beard and great wisdom (Stiessel, 1, 3, 10) and the interpretation here is that Dumbledore correspond to Zeus and also to Oden, the wise god in Norse mythology, who at times travelled amongst ordinary humans as an old man (Davidson, 23-24; Grönbech, 17). The resemblance in characters such as Dumbledore, Zeus and Oden and also Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* and Merlin in the legend of *King Arthur* is explained by the expression 'archetype'; that is, figures and patterns

that recurs in an almost identical form in different cultures' myths and folklore, used by CG Jung among others and stated above.

Gandalf's appearance is similar to that of Dumbledore, both in terms of his appearance and actions. The reference to Merlin in *Philosopher's Stone*, 'Order of Merlin' (60), where Dumbledore is a member, shows yet another great sorcerer and 'wise old man who supplied moral guidance as well as magic' (<http://newworldencyclopedia>). Merlin prepares Arthur as a boy for kingship and is his helper and adviser, taking on the same important role as Gandalf in Frodo's life and Dumbledore in Harry's life. In *Philosopher's Stone*, as well as in *The Lord of the Rings* and the legend about *King Arthur*, the occurrence of good versus evil is found and the more archetypes found in a work, the more polarities dominate (Griffith, 175).

CG Jung also states that the archetype 'the wise old man' has, like all other archetypes, both a positive and a negative aspect (Jung, 149). The interpretation of this is here that Dumbledore stands for the positive aspect, but also that Voldemort is applicable as the evil version of the concept 'the old man'. Voldemort, in comparison with Dumbledore, is more of an immortal, demoniacal being and as such stands for the negative aspect of the archetype 'the wise old man'. Voldemort is the 'Master of Darkness' and thought of as 'worse than worse' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 17).

Lord Voldemort is thought of as the most evil wizard ever. He started out as any other wizard in his youth but then went 'as bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse' according to Hagrid (64). Voldemort is so frightening that other wizards and witches dare not say his name out loud but calls him 'You-Know-Who' (17), the only one who is not afraid of saying Voldemort is Professor Dumbledore, who in his turn is the only wizard Voldemort fears (17-18). Voldemort, after having tried to kill the infant Harry, somehow lost his strength and therefore seeks the Philosopher's stone to regain his strength, being well aware of its power. He wants to be immortal and be able to, once again, spread his dark magic (Highfield,

275) but until then he has taken up residence in the back of Quirrell's head '...there was a face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen ...like a snake' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 315). This in turn shows Hagrid to be right when he says 'Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die' (67) which fits the description of 'the wise old man's archetype' as an 'immortal demoniacal being'.

The ancient archetype of womanhood, the stereotyped version, where a woman keeps in the background, silent, beautiful and effective in domestic work versus the liberated woman who claims her participation in society is also present in *Philosopher's Stone* by appearance of Hermione. She becomes Harry's friend and helps out in solving different tasks on their way of finding the Philosopher's stone. She takes pride in her intelligence and demands to play an active part in the events that take place at Hogwarts and other places, fighting against the evil forces on the same conditions as Harry and Ron. Even when Harry tries to warn her off, saying she might get expelled if caught, she is determined to go on saying 'Not if I can help it ... Flitwick told me ... I got a hundred and twelve per cent on his exam. They're not throwing me out after that' (*Philosopher's Stone*, 292). Her self-confidence is very strong, which is not always appreciated by fellow pupils, or by Harry and Ron.

Her appearance is not always appreciated by Harry and Ron as when she has left their compartment on the train and Ron comments on her person, not wanting to be in the same house as her (118). Hermione is intense and wants to perform at the top of her peak, which is here interpreted as a need to compensate for the fact that she is not pure blood 'Nobody in my family's magic at all' (117). Showing her intelligence '...I've learnt all our set books off by heart, of course...' (117) is her way trying to be on equal footing with the pure-blooded. Her intelligence and willingness to study hard will be appreciated by Harry and Ron as the story continues, and they end up in difficult situations. In the following paragraph Hermione is illustrated as a reference to mythology.

The name Hermione is the feminine form of Hermes, son of the Greek god Zeus, in Greek mythology (Colbert, 135). Hermes is the messenger of the gods and the god of eloquence. Hermione is also quite eloquent and a 'messenger' of the good aspects of the art of witchcraft, which is why she is here compared with Hermes in Greek mythology (Linders, 188). She saves Harry and Ron more than once by bringing forth her magical knowledge, for example when she saves them from the Devil's Snare using her wand and a magic spell (*Philosopher's Stone*, 298-99). She is wise in that respect she never uses more magic than she can tackle successfully.

Furthermore, the token of Hermes is the herald cane, which stands for wisdom and the power of healing. Hermione has her wand, here seen as a reference to Hermes cane, and power of healing, a power which Hermione also has, which will be revealed in later Harry Potter novels (*Deathly Hallows*), where, yet again, she shows her wisdom not to use more magic than she manages. Although there are similarities between Hermione and mythology there is also a difference; Hermes leads the souls of the dead to the kingdom of the dead, which is something Hermione does not do. Besides this, there is another reference in the novel to Hermes; the owl with the same name which in the novel brings messages and in mythology is thought of as a symbol of intelligence and also the holy bird of goddess Athena (Linders, 170; Davidson, 191-92). In times of peace Athena is the goddess of wisdom and the Greek equivalent to Professor Minerva McGonagall.

In *Philosopher's Stone* the character that corresponds to the Greek Athena, is Professor Minerva McGonagall, the teacher of Transfiguration at Hogwarts. Professor McGonagall is a wise woman, and in her wisdom, Professor McGonagall notices Hermione's great potential to become a skillful witch, given the proper education, and she is well aware of what help Hermione can provide for Harry in the war against the evil forces, not least Voldemort. Therefore she provides Hermione with the 'Time Turner' (*Prisoner of Azkaban*) which looks

like an hourglass (Highfield, 29) and hence Hermione can attend more lessons, learn the art of witchcraft more quickly and assist Harry in battle. The actions, taken by Professor McGonagall, show her strategic ability, arranging beforehand for the battles to come, here thought of as yet another correspondence to Athena, who is also goddess of the orderly combat.

In the introduction this essay claims that one reason why *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is a great success also amongst adult readers, is because of its references to ancient mythologies from different cultures. According to Joseph Campbell people usually think either of Greek mythology or of the biblical mythology when myths are discussed, wherefore this essay focuses on identifying references with equivalents in Greek mythology. This is done with the aid of close reading, but because of the numerous references in the novel, the essay focuses only on a few. Occasional reference is also made to Norse mythology, where relevant, to show that parallels between mythologies exist throughout the world in themes and characters, even if not always identical. Not all references have to do with mythology, though, and to indicate this fact one reference to a legend, the legend about *King Arthur*, is also illustrated.

Besides its claim, this essay sets out to show that J.K. Rowling's novel *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels have what is required to replace the ancient myths, not only by the lexical description of 'myth' as 'a tale about things that are supernatural, as in Greek myths of heroes' but also by their capacity to give guidance to young people, which is what ancient myths do. This will be more thoroughly expounded on hereafter.

Young people in today's modern IT society want action and *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels provide both action and a supernatural world, with enthralling characters and amazing events, where good is at war with evil. In *Philosopher's Stone* there is the monstrous three-headed dog and exciting obstacles to be dealt with deep down in the underground.

Furthermore there is Harry, the hero in the novel and the self-confident pretty girl Hermione, who dares to do just about anything. The good Professor Dumbledore and the evil Lord Voldemort add even more 'spice' to the events. *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels have caught the young readers' attention and, as said in the introduction, are a great success throughout the world. The Harry Potter novels are appropriate to the time in which young people today are living, being modernized versions of ancient myths.

However, young people today have no knowledge about ancient myths since, as Campbell also states, people no longer read or talk about those myths. Because of these circumstances, young people have difficulties in seeing the references in the novel as anything else but action and supernatural events. They can not see the connection between the references, such as the three-headed dog, and the ancient myths. If the Harry Potter novels are to replace ancient myths, they have to provide guidance as well. It is all there, in the novels, but someone has to give voice to those connections between the novels and the myths.

This is why adults with such knowledge are required to point out the references to young people, explain the connections to ancient myths and their significance. It is in this process that adults can provide the guidance, teach young people about life, discuss life models and help them in understanding the world they live in. When discussions like these take place between adult readers and young readers, then *Philosopher's Stone* and the sequels have replaced the myths of ancient times, but only then.

Interesting analyses in future research can be done both from a feminist point of view, using the theory of Feminist Criticism, focusing on for instance Hermione and her development through the seven novels and also from a psychological point of view. With the aid of Psychological Criticism, an analysis whether the good Professor Dumbledore and the evil Lord Voldemort are not just a fabrication of what is really going on in Harry's mind could be done. An adult can understand the struggle that goes on within a person, between

good and evil, but for young people to understand that struggle it is necessary to give 'a body' to these feelings and the struggle. Professor Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort may just personify the feelings of good and evil.

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