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THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PORTRAITS OF THE ANCIENT GREEK GODS: POSTMODERN PARODY IN PHILLIPS' GODS BEHAVING BADLY

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the postmodern parody in Marie Phillips' *Gods Behaving Badly* which reimagines ancient Greek mythology in contemporary London. It also explores postmodern parody and satire to show how the novel functions as a deconstruction of classical mythology, heroism, and divine power. The novel challenges ancient myths finding new relevance and satire in the gods of Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo forced to contend with real-life issues like capitalism and consumerism. It is a metaphor for the waning influence of classical mythology in a contemporary, nonbeliever world: the god's complete descent from omnipotence into irrelevancy. Through the story of an ordinary man whose awkwardness and lack of traditional heroic also traits challenge received ideas of bravery, it examines the critique of modern heroism. How Phillips uses satire to critique the materialistic thinking that is so widespread today can be seen as an example of criticising postmodern culture. Even the afterlife, as depicted in the novel, is an arena under capitalist control. This paper applies Hutcheon's theory of postmodern parody to *Gods Behaving Badly* which demonstrates how the novel blends humour with social satire to reinterpret ancient myths in a postmodern context. By analysing the novel's engagement with traditional mythological narratives and contemporary cultural criticism, this study highlights how Phillips' work functions as a site of literary transformation and social commentary.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Parody, Satire, Contemporary Mythology, *Gods Behaving Badly*.

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**ANTİK YUNAN TANRILARININ YİRMİ BİRİNCİ YÜZYIL
PORTRELERİ:
PHILLIPS'İN GODS BEHAVING BADLY ROMANINDA
POSTMODERN PARODİ**

ÖZ

Bu makale, Marie Phillips'in antik Yunan mitolojisini günümüz Londra'sında yeniden canlandıran *Gods Behaving Badly* romanındaki postmodern parodiyi tartışmaktadır. Ayrıca, romanın klasik mitolojinin, kahramanlığın ve ilahi gücün yapı sökümü olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü göstermek için postmodern parodi ve hiciv özelliklerini araştırmaktadır. Roman, Zeus, Artemis ve Apollo gibi tanrıların kapitalizm ve tüketimcilik gibi gerçek hayat sorunlarıyla mücadele etmek zorunda kalışlarında yeni bir anlam ve hiciv bularak eski mitlere meydan okumaktadır. Çağdaş, inançsız bir dünyada klasik mitolojinin azalan etkisi için bir metafor, yani tanrının her şeye kadir olmaktan tamamen ilgisizliğe inişini betimlemektedir. Beceriksizliği ve geleneksel kahramanlık özelliklerinden yoksunluğu, kabul görmüş cesaret fikirlerine meydan okuyan sıradan bir adamın hikayesi aracılığıyla, modern kahramanlığın eleştirisini incelemektedir. Phillips'in günümüzde çok yaygın olan materyalist düşüncüyü eleştirmek için hicvi nasıl kullandığı, postmodern kültürü eleştirmenin bir örneği olarak görülebilir. Romanda tasvir edildiği şekliyle öbür dünya bile kapitalist kontrol altında bir yerdir. Bu makale, Hutcheon'un postmodern parodi teorisini *Gods Behaving Badly* romanına uygulayarak, romanın antik mitleri postmodern bir bağlamda yeniden yorumlamak için mizahı sosyal hicivle nasıl harmanladığını göstermektedir. Romanın geleneksel mitolojik anlatılarla ve çağdaş kültürel eleştiriyi ilişkisini analiz eden bu çalışma, Phillips'in eserinin hem edebi dönüşüm hem de sosyal yorum alanı olarak nasıl işlev gördüğünü vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Postmodernizm, Parodi, Hiciv, Çağdaş Mitoloji, *Gods Behaving Badly*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Myths originating from diverse cultures have been transmitted through both written records and storytelling traditions. Mythology occupies a critical position in the evolution of civilisations since it encompasses the essence of each society and continuously influences language, culture, and literature. Elizabeth Hand (2005) states in *the Washington Post* that mythology is constantly changing and evolving with new myths being created and old ones being reimagined in various settings around the world. For this reason, every written or spoken account of these myths reconstructs the original narratives by incorporating different perspectives and various literary devices. Thus, mythology is always evolving and open to multiple interpretations, allowing for exploration, adaptation, and diversity (Li, 2005, p. 74). Myths can be rewritten or retold to give readers and writers fresh perspectives on life's greater meaning. Mythology has the power to transform attitudes and inspire individuals to embrace life more fully (Armstrong, 2005, p. 10). Additionally,

with the help of these freshly produced works, intertextuality emerges between the past, the present, and even the future. Thus, they create an “ideal of reversible time” (Csapo, 2009, p. 220) generating a sense of timelessness that transforms chaos into a structured universe of Platonic forms which embodies logical tranquillity, order, and significance (Csapo, 2009, p. 237). However, it is important to proceed cautiously and carefully analyse every detail without straying from the original language of images in rewriting. The true essence of a myth lies in its literal narrative rather than in external interpretations (Calvino, 2009, p. 4). As one of the significant writers who has retold mythological stories, Margaret Atwood believes that all writers are influenced by those who came before them. Writers must be able to draw inspiration from past stories while also creating something new. They must actively engage with the past and bring it back to life for their readers. This involves a process of both borrowing and reclaiming ideas to create meaningful change in the world (Atwood, 2002, p. 178). Hence, these so-called ‘dead’ narratives are universally acknowledged as continually revitalised through rewriting that manifests in various literary genres and forms (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 8). Mythology allows for constant reinterpretation and change reflecting both the beliefs of the dominant culture and the criticisms of those beliefs (Braund, 2012, p. 206).

The retelling of myths has been a popular tradition, especially during the Roman era. Nowadays, mythological figures, themes, and storylines are commonly reimaged through a postmodern perspective by challenging their traditional characteristics. One of the most valuable literary techniques for reinterpreting original forms is postmodern parody. To fully grasp this concept, it is essential to first define the postmodernist movement. This movement briefly strives to challenge and upend the established order and normative structures in all aspects of society. Linda Hutcheon (2004), a notable postmodern theorist, believes that postmodernism challenges traditional ways of communication by blending personal identity, the connection between language and its meaning, and the relationships between different texts in a non-traditional manner (p. xiii). It underscores the necessity for writers to acknowledge how past “representations” have shaped modern culture, emphasising that they cannot escape this influence (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 58). Therefore, rewriting or representing the past in fiction is encouraged by postmodern literature to make it more inclusive of the present and avoid being definitive (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 59), so this phenomenon serves as a useful “revolutionary” tool in a rewriting of mythology (Jameson, 1984, p. 54). As one of the mythology rewriters, Byatt (2000) defines this rewriting creation as both modern and ancient (p. 131) of searching different opinions in ancient myths and forms that have endured and transformed over time (p. 124).

The fictional products of the second half of the twentieth century play an essential part in destroying the dependability of the previous centuries' literary works since they encompass "irony" and "parody" (Brooks, 1984, p. 7). Thus, parody becomes an inevitable tool in postmodernism and this literary device can be described as using and paradoxically misusing specific forms of representation and basic norms to "de-naturalize" them (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 8) and so many authors have combined "parody and history" through questioning a traditional realistic representational structure (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 15). This "representation" of the past fiction includes "parody" (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 93).

Marie Phillips' first novel, *Gods Behaving Badly* (2007), is a striking example of postmodern literature, as it humorously reinterprets ancient Greek mythology by placing the twelve Olympian gods in contemporary Hampstead, London, where they struggle with mundane, human-like challenges (Segal, 2007, p. 10). Phillips was inspired by an instructor's observations on the human-like nature of ancient deities, which led her to explore the question: what if the Greek gods were real and still lived among us? (Calkin, 2007, p. 12). The novel presents these deities grappling with modern societal issues, stripping them of their divine omnipotence and forcing them into the complexities of everyday life. Building on this perspective, this paper argues that mythology continues to shape literature, culture, and society through constant reinterpretation. Postmodern parody serves as a key literary device in this process, as it both challenges and reconfigures traditional mythological narratives, offering fresh cultural insights. Phillips' novel exemplifies this approach by revitalising and transforming classical mythology through humour and satire. Therefore, this study examines *Gods Behaving Badly* in the context of postmodern parody, analysing how Greek mythology has been reconstructed within a contemporary framework and what this adaptation reveals about modern cultural discourse.

2. Postmodern Parody in *Gods Behaving Badly*

Postmodern literature frequently engages with existing narratives through various forms of reinterpretation, including parody, satire, and rewriting, and each of them serves distinct features but they have interconnected functions. Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of originality and representation, and parody emerges as one of its central literary tools. As Hutcheon (2007) asserts, postmodern parody is not merely an act of imitation or ridicule but rather a denaturalising "form of acknowledging the history of representations" (p. 94). It functions through "ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality" (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 93) that combines "the present" with "the past" while preserving the representation's clarity (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 98). Thus, parody operates as both an affirmation and a critique, simultaneously confirming and subverting "the power of the

representations of history” (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 95). Furthermore, Hutcheon (2004) emphasises that postmodern parody thrives on “ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity, difference at the heart of similarity” (p. 11). This paradoxical nature allows parody to “both incorporate and challenge that which it parodies,” and encourages a reconsideration of originality and historical interpretation (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). Rather than serving as a tool for mere mockery, parody engages with historical and cultural memory to interrogate dominant narratives, as it “forces a reconsideration of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). It also facilitates a reconsideration of artistic features and their underlying ideological functions, since postmodernism employs parody “to engage the history of art and the memory of the viewer in a re-evaluation of aesthetic forms and contents through a reconsideration of their usually unacknowledged politics of representation” (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 100). Given this theoretical framework, Phillips’ *Gods Behaving Badly* exemplifies postmodern parody by recontextualising ancient Greek mythology within a contemporary setting, subverting its original narratives, and challenging traditional representations of heroism, divinity, and authority. Through an analysis of the novel’s engagement with parody, this study explores how classical mythology is preserved and reinterpreted within a postmodern literary framework.

Postmodern literature frequently engages with mythological and historical narratives through rewriting which does not only retell but also reinterprets earlier texts within a contemporary framework. Past narratives are reworked to challenge original narratives and traditional authority in postmodern rewriting. In this context, *Gods Behaving Badly* exemplifies postmodern mythological rewriting by relocating the Olympian gods to modern-day London and stripping them of their divine characteristics. Among these myths, Ancient Greek Mythology has rooted its stories into different genres and literary forms throughout centuries. Many writers, dramatists, and poets benefit from these mythological characters and plots in their own ways. In the myth’s original version, this “Olympian system” arises from “a divine family of six gods and six goddesses, headed by the co-sovereigns Zeus and Hera and forming a Council of Gods in Babylonian style” (Graves, 1992, p. 19), and these Gods and Goddesses maintain their lives in the golden age. Nevertheless, they fight for their lives in twenty-first-century London in the rewritten version of Phillips. Until the book’s ending, its readers encounter their weaknesses and unhappiness in a wrecked house. Nevertheless, their miserable situations cannot prevent quarrels between them and one of these affects two humans; thus, London must witness the struggle between mortal and immortal besides daily life and the afterlife. This shift from divine

omnipotence to human-like struggles is central to Phillips' portrayal of the gods which will be explored further with postmodern parody.

Postmodern parody provides “an ironic discontinuity” described as “the heart of continuity, [the] difference at the heart of similarity” and it simultaneously integrates and questions the subject it parodies (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). Hence, this tool creates “a reconsideration of origin or originality” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11). Mount Olympus is traditionally depicted as the home of the gods and goddesses in ancient Greek mythology. These twelve divine beings reside there and govern human affairs. In *Gods Behaving Badly*, the readers perceive that the Gods and Goddesses had to leave the mountain, and the family moved to London in 1665 during a time of low property prices due to the plague. Later, the great fire in London caused property prices to rise significantly (Phillips, 2007, p. 9)¹. This occurred because the mountain “had broken off into the sea” (p. 37). Olympus was a magnificent palace once and now the house in north London is an absolute wreck even though it is “a typically canny piece of financial engineering by [...] Athena, the goddess of wisdom” (p. 9). Throughout the novel, Phillips defines the house in detail by focusing on the weak and poor situations of the landlords. Every room and even every piece of the house is in a state of decay, described as “damp, crumbling, leaking” (p. 10). The decay starts from “the front door. The once-glossy black paint was peeling off in long, jagged streaks, and the knocker, in the shape of a laurel wreath, was so tarnished that it was impossible to tell what kind of metal it had been originally” (p. 13). All household goods “were torn or broken” (p. 14) and everything is “collapsing” (p. 54). When the mortal Alice becomes a cleaner at the house as the deed of the God of coincidence, “she hadn’t anticipated quite how dirty it would be” (p. 61) and she “nearly vomited” (p. 62). The filth and disrepair worsen over time, as “[t]here simply wasn’t enough room for all of them” (p. 69) and so it is “the hated house” (p. 69) which “was literally falling down” (p. 87). However, despite this discontinuity, a parallel exists between the original myth and the house in London. According to mythology, Zeus and Hera live at the top of Olympus, and in the novel, they live on “the forbidden top floor of the house” (p. 122). Yet, their domination is not as spectacular as it was once, and even the corridor is covered by “cobweb-laced and caked with solidified layers of dust and grime” with “fat, sleek” rats and “giant cockroaches” (p. 121). Zeus’s room was forbidden to the rest of the family except his wife Hera since the couple is afraid of the possibility of the murder of Zeus as he “killed his father” and “got the job” (p. 123). Additionally, the readers can visualise the room through the limited number of items as “bed [...] with mildewed blankets,” “a low wooden crate,” a “TV” and “there was nothing” (p. 130). Phillips employs postmodern parody by recontextualising

¹ From now on, only page numbers will be given for the citations from *Gods Behaving Badly* by Phillips 2007.

the magnificence of Mount Olympus within the framework of a ruined London home that deprives the gods of their former majesty and subjects them to the realities of human existence. This transformation reflects the postmodern tendency to undermine original narratives and deconstruct authoritative myths. The irony in the gods' financial struggles, particularly Athena's failed financial ventures highlights the absurdity of their decline. The detailed descriptions of decay and filth from crumbling walls to infested corridors serve as a strong contrast to the divine power and perfection traditionally associated with the Olympians. Furthermore, parody operates through the exaggerated collocation between past and present. Whereas Zeus and Hera once ruled the cosmos from a celestial throne, they are now confined to "the forbidden top floor [of a collapsing] house" (p. 122). This inversion in power dynamics mocks the mythological trope of divine omnipotence, and it reinforces that these once-revered gods are now obsolete in the modern world. Additionally, Zeus's fear of being murdered, a reference to his act of patricide in classical mythology, is reimagined in a mundane and comedic sense, further satirising his former role as the ultimate ruler. By presenting the gods as struggling landlords rather than celestial beings, Phillips does not merely relocate them to a different setting but actively reinterprets and diminishes their mythic significance, she turns them into figures of ridicule. Hence, through postmodern parody, the writer does not produce an amusing copy of the original but reinterprets it while also maintaining a critical perspective that highlights ironic differences within similarities (Hutcheon 2004, p. 11). One might also claim that in addition to being a parody of the magnificent Mount Olympus, the ruin of the Gods' London palace also serves as a symbol of the power and significance that will eventually fade that comes with changing times. The house might represent more than just the absurd demise of the Gods; it might also be a deeper allegory for the diminishing power of old myths in modern culture. As this analysis demonstrates, parody does not only imitate but also critically reshapes its source material which can be seen in the portrayal of individual gods.

Although postmodern parody imitates the original sources, it also allows postmodern writers to use classic literature as a basis for their work, rewriting it in a modern context to both draw on its influence and connect with current society (Dentith, 2002, p. 17). *Gods Behaving Badly* starts with Artemis, who is the Goddess "of hunting and chastity," "of the moon, and several other things" (p. 4). The readers can easily realise her poor conditions and her suffering with the first pages of the book. She is in pain, and she hates acknowledging any form of frailty, particularly to a human (p. 5). She walks mortals' dogs for a living and returns them "to their ungrateful owners and [accepts] her derisory pay" (p. 13). Since their house is a complete mess, she tries to find a flat, but she cannot even afford a proper one. Her family questions her beliefs in her deity because hunting is banned in the country.

They also question the idea of “chastity,” calling it outdated and insinuating that she may not have any left (p. 17). She is fed up with these harsh situations when she sees Demeter -Goddess of the earth and fertility- in a desperate mood, for she cannot save plants in their garden and she believes that she is dying, Artemis feels “a little bit jealous” (p. 86) and she strongly accepts that dying is much better than living like this. In further chapters, she also finds “herself imagining being dead” (p. 127). She falls into despair, and she is forced to kill her dogs because her family can no longer afford to take care of them even though the dogs were the only ones who utterly understood her (p. 181). Therefore, postmodern parody is used to rewrite Artemis in the present world while keeping her original goddess qualities. It is possible to see that Artemis is portrayed in the contemporary world as a parody of her mythological qualities. It may be countered that this portrayal undermines the idea of Gods as unbeatable entities and emphasises how flexible mythological characters can be in different situations. Artemis may be a more approachable and humanised representation of a God because of her fragility.

Postmodern works often use parody to criticise and ridicule the “official word,” mock authoritative discourse, and question the seriousness of certain topics (Dentith, 2002, p. 20) that change the original material. Artemis’s twin brother, Apollo, as the God of prophecy, sun, and light, is reimagined through satire and parody. He is a fortune teller in a TV program named “Apollo’s Oracle” (p. 34), and the studio and his dressing room are falling. Even the name of the program has “been misspelled: Appollo’s Oracle” and he is “being housed like second-class vaudeville” act (p. 25). The program is worse than the backstage and Apollo makes use of his prophecy talent. He reassures the audience that Little Cliff, a lost cat, is safe and will return home soon from the neighbour’s garage. The cat is tired of eating mice and asks for his favourite food to be prepared for him when he gets home (p. 36). Hence, God Apollo’s excellent features are mocked in the modern world because human beings no longer believe in him. To survive, he relies on this ridiculous show and its trivial content. Hence, his prophecy talent, which is mentioned in the original myth, is mocked by postmodern parody with the help of seriousness and this also presents “his weakness” (p. 48). Although Apollo’s insignificant TV show parodies the god of prophecy, it could also be interpreted as a reflection of the Gods’ attempt to maintain relevance in a culture that no longer values their old functions. Apollo’s shift to an absurd career may symbolise the gods’ struggle to remain relevant in a world that has moved beyond its ancient beliefs. Furthermore, he falls in love with the mortal Alice in that TV show because of Eros’s arrow and Alice becomes a cleaner after Aphrodite convinces Hermes to bring her into the house to raise “[Apollo’s] weakness” (p. 48). However, Alice turns this handsome God down and Apollo is depressed, and he goes to Dionysus’s nightclub to drown his sorrows in alcohol. In the morning, he wakes up on the floor and his pain

becomes torture. He does not have money for a bus ride and searches the ground. Apollo is ostracised by other people at the bus stop who avoid him, and show their disapproval and disgust. Even, the bus driver departs before Apollo can board (pp. 114-115). Hence, the presence of an actual god is humiliated in the postmodern world.

Parody in postmodern literature blends “the present” and “the past” and it does not change the transparentness of reproduction (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 98). Based on this analysis, Aphrodite - the goddess of beauty - serves as a clear example. In the past, she was among the twelve powerful gods and goddesses with her virtue of love, beauty, pleasure, and procreation, but today her family questions her virtues as a “Goddess of beauty,” pointing out the contradiction of beauty standards and the obesity epidemic on Earth (p. 17). She also works as a phone sex operator and even her son Eros criticises her “Why can’t you get a decent job [...] you could be a model,” but she defends her business by claiming that “phone sex is much more fun” (p. 26). In this postmodern representation, the writer focuses on the contemporary portrait of the character by presenting every detail while simultaneously bringing the past and the present together.

Myths are used to explain natural phenomena and the origins of the universe serving as early forms of science as people tried to interpret their surroundings. So, “religion” does not play a role in mythological explanations (Hamilton, 1999, p. 19). In *Gods Behaving Badly*, although Eros knows the origin of religions, he believes in Jesus as a good Christian. He has examined the Bible and the life of Jesus, although his mother Aphrodite criticises him for preferring the “upstart carpenter -that thief of faith- to [his] own flesh and blood” (p. 27). However, he thinks that Jesus is “a better role model” than his family (p. 27) and he accepts that there are “still some things he [does not] quite get about Christianity”, but he still prays: “Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name” (p. 38). He goes to church and he always quotes from the Bible. However, when the world is about to end due to the passing out of Apollo who cannot cope with the pain of losing Alison, he confesses that he is “giving up hope” (p. 269), for he does not “have faith” (p. 270). As soon as the gods and goddesses begin to gain their powers after convincing people that they are real by resurrecting Alison, Eros utters his thrust about Christianity one more time: “This is what I kept saying [...] about mortal belief” (p. 287). Yet, this trust does not last long; whenever he is powerful again, the rest of the family says, “he’s finding it hard not being a Christian anymore, all the Jesus stuff keeps creeping back in” (p. 291). So, Christianity is used as a tool in this postmodern version of the Greek myth for putting up with troubles without considering any holy issues and the religion completes its mission when the believer goes back to his glorious days. It is possible to interpret the portrayal of Eros as a reproducing process - a parody of the Gods taking up innovative ideas in the face of losing power - by seeing it as his conversion to

Christianity. But by implying that the divine may live with changing faiths, others would counter that it also calls into question the adaptability of beliefs and the ability of the Gods to change.

Linda Hutcheon (2000) sees parody as a fun, friendly way to mock established forms which can range from “admiration” to harsh criticism (p. 15) and in the novel, Zeus is presented as an old senile man who has amnesia. When Apollo goes into his room, he realises that Zeus -the God of the sky and thunder and the ruling God- spends his days just watching TV. He has “no awareness that anyone had come into the room” (p. 129). However, he still remembers that one of his children could murder him. He is physically and mentally in an abject situation, his face is “yellowed and creased [...] his hair had grown long and dirty white, and hung lifelessly by his head [...] the skin was so pale it was almost gray” (pp. 130-131). Furthermore, he cannot recognise Apollo, constantly asks who he is and whether he comes with the purpose of murder. He asks the same question over and over: “What were we talking about?” (p. 131). Even though he can barely walk, there is “almost none of him left. All of his muscle seemed to have been eaten away, and his skin sagged loosely off his bones” (p. 132). When all the family members gather at Trafalgar Square to resurrect Alice and to prove that they are all gods and goddesses at the end of the novel, Zeus still asks, “Am I still mad?” and his wife Hera answers, “Yes, you are, dear” (p. 281). Hence, these two opposite characteristics of Zeus in the past and the present create parody as “the mixture of conservative and revolutionary impulses” (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 115). A comic perspective on the fall of a once-powerful God serves to parody Zeus as an elderly man with dementia. The typical patriarchal image of Zeus may be criticised by some readers, who argue that considering his past abuses of power, his fall from grace is a good thing.

According to Booker (1991), a successful parody should provide a fresh perspective on the original texts by transforming them (p. 95). In this rewritten version of Greek mythology, readers can clearly sense this transformation. From the beginning of the novel, the gods’ and goddesses’ desperate circumstances are evident: “Things had been so much easier in the years that they were now obliged to refer to as BC,” (p. 10) but in the twenty-first century, everything is “like a basket of overripe fruit, every one of them passed their best, and the rot starting to creep in” (p. 33). All of them can see “their future now, and they [do not] like what they saw” (p. 48). Apollo explains to Alice how he and other mythological figures were once famous and worshipped in ancient Greece and Rome. They lived in luxury and were adored by everyone. However, as times changed, they fell out of fashion losing their power and influence. Apollo reveals that a television show allowed him to feel a sense of connection to his former glory and happiness (pp. 65-66). His explanation presents their depression and pain, and this changes the readers’ perspectives toward mythological gods and goddesses.

Since “money” (p. 72) has become the ultimate object of worship in modern times, people “don’t need [them] anymore. They don’t want [them]. They’re forgetting about [them]” (p. 74). They are “getting old and [they] have to live in that disgusting tiny house” (p. 264). Thus, in the twenty-first century, the limitless power and eternal lifetime of gods and goddesses are parodied and questioned by postmodernism since parody “paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 11).

Postmodernism witnessed the rise of new products and technologies following the resolution of wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts (Jameson, 1991, p. xx). In this new world order, people’s attitudes towards the economy also changed and created a “consumer culture” (Jameson, 1991, p. 204). Thus, societies’ consumerist mainstream served as an element of a parody since it satirised people who “integrated into consumer society” (Jameson, 1991, p. 147). In *Gods Behaving Badly*, as mentioned earlier, people lost their beliefs in ancient Greek gods and goddesses, and only worshipped money. Even the Zeus family understands the power of money and God Hermes approves this idea as “time is money” (p. 119). However, it is intriguing that money is not only related to daily life, in the novel, the consumerist approach is also common in the afterlife. When Alice turns Apollo down, he cannot bear this pain. He has Zeus kill her by manipulating him, so the help of Alice’s transportation from the world into the underworld becomes clear to the readers. As she starts to walk in the underworld, she realises that there are “tall buildings” which are “stunning, massive and glorious” (p. 188), and she learns that they serve as business centres. Even though she does not need anything, a woman suggests Alice get a job by interestingly adding: “there is no need for you to do anything at all. You have no body. You have no needs. You require no food, no shelter. There is no money” (p. 190). However, she advises her to work, because “it is good to work. You have [a] purpose. You meet people. You do not get depressed” (p. 191) and she sends Alice up to the “careers department immediately” (p. 191). When she meets the career adviser in the department, the man asks her what her “predeath work experience” was (p. 192). She realises that there is “endlessly in demand” for “architecture” and “engineering” (p. 192) since they hold everything together, “none of it is real. It’s all done with the power of the mind. And that takes skill and training” (p. 192). Additionally, God Hades and his wife Persephone rule the afterlife and everything, including roads, buildings, and even plants, are constructed by the mental power of the dead people in the underworld. As in the upper world, there is the privilege of the king and the queen, for instance, their palace’s “exact appearance changed constantly, depending on [Persephone’s] preference at that exact moment. It took on the form of the past and present upper world’s most glorious buildings, from the Taj Mahal to the Pyramids” (p. 243). Alice knows that every detail is constructed by dead souls through their imagination, and she is stumped

with “high stone walls,” “golden gates” and “pomegranate trees” (p. 244). As she approaches the palace, she witnesses the capitalist consumerist system in detail as “the driveway was made of gravel – an astonishing luxury, as each individual pebble had to be imagined by someone” (p. 244). Thus, the king and the queen of the underworld make use of dead people as a source for their pleasure as an example of the capitalist system to have “these replaced with representations of themselves” (p. 254). Furthermore, in the upper world, Artemis notices that Alice -her cleaner- died because of Apollo and decides to enter the underworld, but as a living goddess, she cannot go there, and she needs to sneak in with the help of a mortal hero. Neil who loves Alice deeply accepts her offer after he gets Apollo “passed out on [his] kitchen floor and [he thinks] the world’s about the end” since the sun went out with the collapse of Apollo (p. 213). Neil, Alice, and Artemis meet at the palace after Artemis defeats the monstrous dog of Hades -Cerberus, and they demand the help of the kingdom to save the world. However, regarding the end of the world, Hades has a materialistic viewpoint. He just thinks about his benefit: “[o]nce the upperworld ends, all of the mortals there will become [his] subjects” (p. 262) and he adds: “[w]e’ll own them. We’ll have all of the power, and you’ll have nothing. Why should we help you?” (p. 262). Although Artemis cannot convince him, Alice points out the limitedness of their subjects: “Because if everybody dies, [...] nobody will be born. [...] you’ll never gain any more souls after that. Not a single one. [...] After that, you’ll effectively start losing power” (p. 262). Since Persephone knows that Neil is a structural engineer, she refuses to send him back: “Can’t I keep him? I’ll look after him, I promise. You know how much I love engineers. And structural is my favorite kind” (pp. 263-264). Even though Hades allows them to return to the upper world, his wife is displeased with this decision, and she insists on keeping him. Hades tries to convince her as if she were a child: “Persephone, darling, engineers die all the time. Even this one, eventually. Sooner rather than later, probably, given the situation,” for he wants his hellhound back as an exchange: “There’s only one Cerberus.” But the queen is sad about it and whines: “You never let me have anything I want” (p. 266). Hence, Neil becomes free in exchange for Cerberus because he is also a typical subject which helps them to construct what they desire. Although this creates a parody of the idea of after death, the novel has not wasted “its meaning and purpose,” and this opportunity will inescapably own “a new and different significance” (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 94).

In the upper world, things are similar to the underworld, both mortals and the Zeus family have consumerist attitudes. Due to Apollo’s blackout, the sun disappears, causing everything to freeze and bringing the world to the brink of collapse. Even though there is no place to shelter, the goddess Aphrodite is meticulously packing her things while there are still some people who call her for phone sex. She thinks “the packing” is “going very well, [...] because most of her clothes folded up extremely small so she could fit them

into compact luggage with ease” (p. 268), but to her, the biggest problems are “the shoes”, for she is going to “need lots of pairs” (p. 268). When her son Eros comes to check on her and thinks that she has given up hope, she objects to this idea and says: “who’s giving up hope? I’m just being prepared” and she adds: “can you hand me one of the boxes of sex toys from under the bed” (p. 268). She believes that even though this world comes to an end, the family is going to survive because they are gods and goddesses, so she is packing. She also criticises the rest of her family for escaping with what they wear and utters, “some of these things are designer [...] And I’m a materialistic bitch” (p. 269). Even if this world ends, her attachment to her possessions remains strong, and the thought of losing them is more terrifying than the apocalypse itself. Hence, through these parodies, Phillips questions the “contemporary consumerist aspirations” by criticising “late twentieth century consumer culture” (Tate, 2011, p. 62).

In postmodern literature, “parody” is often associated with “satire” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 129) and satire “often takes the form of parody” (Matthews, 2012, p. 20), as it creates an unintended excess that paradoxically amuses the audience (Matthews, 2012, p. 22). While parody and satire are closely related, they serve distinct functions in postmodern literature. Parody primarily operates through imitation and often exaggerates stylistic or thematic elements of a source text to create a critical or humorous reinterpretation. On the other hand, satire is more critical and aims to expose flaws in individuals, ideologies, or societal structures. Postmodern parody does not necessarily ridicule its source material but engages with it through repetition with critical distance. However, satire typically carries an element of direct critique that makes its target the subject of mockery rather than recontextualization. Phillips employs both in *Gods Behaving Badly*: she reconstructs parody in Greek mythology within a modern setting and satire in her critique of consumerism and declining belief systems. In the novel, Phillips constructs this parody by satirising the notions of heroism and the heroic ideal. As mentioned earlier, when Artemis learns that Alice died because of Apollo, she thinks that Apollo is cheating, for he took an oath not to destroy a human being, but he did not kill her directly, so he did not break the oath. Since Artemis wants to ruin his plans, she wants to enter the underworld and bring Alice back. However, it is not possible to enter this world, so she needs a hero. Hermes says, “there aren’t any heroes anymore” (p. 163), yet he decides to help her to get “a hero” and to show her “the way into the underworld” (p. 164). Neil, who deeply loves the deceased Alice, becomes Artemis’s chosen candidate. She meets him and asks whether he has ever performed a heroic act (p. 178). Surprised by the question, Neil says he has never done anything remotely heroic (p. 179). He starts to question his behaviour whether he was heroic or not, for instance, being an engineer or his blood donations, and he is unsure if he would risk his life to save strangers

from a burning building until he is tested in that situation (p. 179). By highlighting Alice and her lover's declaration that she is a goddess, Artemis attempts to persuade him. Because there was "a precedent" which "means if you've done it before you can do it again. You can do it, Neil." (p. 184), so he can "go down there and get her back" (p. 184) and "save the planet" (p. 221). However, Neil does not believe in her until Apollo faints and the world freezes. Even though the idea of going down to the underworld and saving the world seems "absurd", "deep down, he [knows] that he [is] also going there to save Alice", and finally he decides to help, for "without Alice, his world [has] already ended" (p. 221). However, he begins to question every detail with his first step, which is an unusual behaviour for Artemis, and she reprehends him "[f]or a hero you ask a lot of questions" (p. 225). When they manage to enter the underworld, Artemis constantly checks whether he really understands the plan or not by saying: "You remember the plan, don't you? When Cerberus makes his appearance. I fight -" (p. 231), but the plan is quite simple for a hero who only runs: "And I run. Yes, I know. [...] It doesn't feel very heroic being the one doing the running" (p. 231). He pulls his weight and starts to run until he sees the river Styx. However, he gets used to being a hero and as soon as he arrives at the river, he introduces himself as: "I am a hero" (p. 236). For the river, it is also unbelievable to meet such a hero and cannot be sure: "You are most unlike any hero who has visited me before" (p. 236), but Neil is also aware of his inefficiency for a hero and says that it is "an emergency [...] The world is ending" (p. 236). Furthermore, he arrives at the palace and this time King Hades and his queen Persephone do not take him seriously, so he needs to prove that he knows about a precedent and wants Alice back. This makes Hades angry, and he shouts: "You're just a mortal [...] Not even a dead one at that. How dare you came here into my palace and start talking about precedents?" (p. 256). However, Neil does not give up his knowledge about the precedent because he does not have adequate information about how a hero should behave and asks Hades to "do it again" as he helped the previous precedent (p. 256). Hades changes his mood into an amusing manner and offers him "a sacrifice, a test" (p. 256) by picking "Neil up with one hand" (p. 257) like a little toy and he says: "You can save the world or you can have your Alice [...] So, mortal, what do you say? World? Alice? World? Alice? World? Alice?" (p. 258). Although Neil chooses the world, Hades puts him into a cage, because he does not "have the power to save or end the world, so it's irrelevant. Still, it was a nice answer" (p. 259). Ultimately, he releases Neil in exchange for his hellhound. Thus, this 'so-called' hero just runs, gets captured, and never engages in a fight. However, as a postmodern hero, he succeeds in a remarkable thing and makes Artemis discover that they are losing their power not because they are getting old, but because people no longer believe in them (p. 283). Thus, Neil is "the perfect person to get those mortals to believe in [them] again" (p. 284), but Neil is "terrible at public speaking" with "no presence" and he does not get a choice,

because Artemis shouts at him “you’re the hero. Do your job” (p. 284). When the crowd of mortals begins to shout all together “Where’s the sun? Where’s the sun?” (p. 283), Artemis points to her hero to explain about the sun to a crowd of confused mortals. However, this hero is also unsuccessful in speaking, he cannot express himself clearly and each sentence alarms the people and causes them to panic as: “He means he’s going to see her in heaven!”, “We’re all going to die!”, “Run!” and “Where to?” (p. 285). He is aware of his awkwardness and tries to calm them down: “Please! Listen to me! We’re not all going to die! Not yet, anyway” (p. 285), but even his attempt at conciliation creates much more “confusion and agitation” (p. 285). Then, he expresses his experiences in the underworld, but this story creates a “boo and hiss” among the crowd and people start to throw things at him (p. 286). However, Artemis happily follows this scene, accepts it as something “perfect” (p. 286) and makes the soul of Alice visible. The crowd is a witness to a miracle and begins to believe in the gods and goddesses after Aphrodite creates Alice’s body. This belief makes the Zeus family powerful again and they wake Apollo up, so the sun comes out. Thus, the postmodern hero’s awkwardness in speech can be useful only with the help of these two goddesses. Although Neil’s portrayal of a postmodern hero is light-hearted, it may be argued that this character questions the conventional heroic ideal. Although Neil’s hesitation and clumsiness could be interpreted as a parody of heroism, it also implies that heroism can take on non-traditional forms and is not necessarily in line with traditional values. Hence, this postmodern work is a form of creative expression where a new work imitates and exaggerates elements of an existing text to create humour or commentary. It often involves satirical elements highlighting the differences between the original text and the new form (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 32).

3. CONCLUSION

This study delves into how Marie Phillips uses her novel *Gods Behaving Badly* as an example of postmodern parody. The novel challenges classical mythology through modern satire techniques in a contemporary setting like contemporary London where the gods of Olympus are portrayed as flawed and sidelined individuals grappling with the issues of capitalism and consumerism while struggling with their relevance in the modern era. Through her use of storytelling methods, Phillips critiques both mythology and present-day culture by highlighting how conventional ideas of power and heroism lose significance in a materialistic society that is becoming increasingly secular. In the novel’s storyline, we see the gods losing their status just as classical myths lose their importance over time; meanwhile, characters like Neil challenge the traditional hero figures in a rebellious way. This study shows how Phillips not only criticises myths but also humorously comments on contemporary values.

Phillips revitalises myths for her readers by exposing the vulnerabilities of both the deities and the institutions they represent. The juxtaposition of traditions with contexts plays a key role in this reimagining process. Through parody in a postmodern framework, readers can appreciate the beauty of classical narratives while acknowledging their relevance, within today's societal constraints. Phillips challenges the concept of heroism by portraying Neil as a hesitant hero to illustrate the contrast between heroic standards and modern-day circumstances; furthermore, the diminishing significance of the gods underscores the fading importance of once-revered stories in a society that prioritises material wealth over mythical tales. However, some critics might say that *Gods Behaving Badly* does not effectively criticise society as it leans more towards humour and parody than offering a profound cultural analysis. Others may feel that Phillips' portrayal of the gods is too simplistic arguing that by turning them into figures the novel diminishes the nature of ancient mythology. These opposing views highlight the line Phillips walks between humour and criticism prompting discussions on whether postmodern parody can be both entertaining and thought-provoking.

Consequently, *Gods Behaving Badly* presents the possibilities of modern-day satire in literature discussed by Hutcheon. By reinterpreting ancient myths in a contemporary context, Phillips not only brings back old myths but also questions the prevailing cultural stories of today. The book's hearted challenge of concepts and the flaws of its deities give readers a new outlook on historical and modern societal systems. Overall, Phillips' creation underscores the significance of mythology while comically revealing the aspects of both bygone eras and the current age. The blending of satire and mythology within a framework highlights the importance of parody as a tool in literature that not only questions established storylines but also plays a role in shaping a changing literary environment where all things can be reinterpreted without limitations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL / PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. There are no participants in this study.

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