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Computers and classical myths

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Abstract

This paper is a qualitative review of a series of classical myths which are or could be used as interpretative metaphors or similes for people, settings, and situations relating to the Computer World. It will look at basic, widely accepted terms like Trojan or Trojan horse, cyberphobia, or Project Athena. It will also infer others through an exercise in hermeneutical mythopoeia. Examples include Tantalus, representing the controlled obsolescence of technological resources, turning the user into a revived Sisyphus, or Theseus as a powerful anti-virus. Not forgetting the clumsy navigator, Odysseus or Ulysses, representing disperse, inefficient Internet users, and especially the great myth of the teacher Mentor, representing the power of information available on the Internet and searchable via Google.

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Notes

1. ICANN ([2011](#)) stands for the internet corporation for assigned names and numbers (ICANN), an international non-profit organization responsible for IP address space allocation, protocol parameter assignment, generic top-level domain (gTLD) and country code top-level domain (ccTLD) name system management, and root server system management functions.
2. In Greek/classical mythology, Panacea (Πανάκεια, Panakeia) was a goddess of universal remedy; in this sense is now used.
3. We refer to the mythical character of Nietzsche than not to the Iranian founder of Zoroastrianism.
4. An old German myth is just coming.

5. Campbell's judgment (Campbell and Moyers [1991](#)) projects that antagonistic duality:
 -I have bought this *wonderful* machine—a computer... it seems to me to be an Old Testament *god with a lot of rules and no mercy* [italics are ours].
6. There are so many websites on mythology, but here is a list of the top ten: Bulfinch's Mythology: www.Tbulfinch.org; Classical Myth: The Ancient Sources: web.uvic.ca/grs/bowman/myth/; Encyclopedia Mythica: www.pantheon.org; Greek Mythology: www.messagenet.com/myths/; Greek Mythology Link: homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/; Mythography: www.loggia.com/myth/; Mythweb: www.mythweb.com; Ovid Project: www.uvm.edu/~hag/ovid/; Perseus Digital Library; www.perseus.tufts.edu; Theoi Project: www.theoi.com.
7. The term computer literacy is highly questioned. We suggest a hierarchy of definitions, from the operational level to the broader socio-political definitions according to Papert's term “letteracy” (Whatis [2011](#)).
8. A Pygmalion effect could have its plausible counter effect: Golem–Frankenstein effect.
9. Ulysses leaves his son Telemachus in the care of his guardian and tutor Mentor (Μέντωρ), who was to train the young man to get him ready to take on his responsibilities as future king. Mentor was responsible for teaching and training Telemachus, guiding–mentoring him through every stage of his physical, intellectual, spiritual and social, education. The Mentoring has an extraordinary pedagogical significance. See also a new interpretation in Table [2](#).
10. See also Theseus in Table [2](#).
11. See also a new interpretation of Ariadne in Table [2](#).

12. From Narcissus (*Νάρκισσος*: *Narkissos*), the personification of the fixation with oneself.
13. Janus, the Roman two-faced goddess represents the duality, the ambivalence but s/he also symbolized change, mutability.
14. The computational model of human memory Minerva 2 was used in a learning-by-browsing system on the Macintosh.
15. *Hydro* (Ὑδρος, hydrus) was the god of the primordial waters (a protogenos).
16. From Proteus (Πρωτεύς), a sea-god. He epitomizes the constantly changing nature of the sea and will change his shape to avoid having to foretell the future. He will answer only to someone who is capable of catching him.
17. The abundance of books is already mentioned in Ecclesiastes (12, 12): “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

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