OPEN FORUM

Computers and classical myths

Antonio Fernández-Cano · Alfonso Fernández-Guerrero

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.

Keywords Computer · Classical myths · Cross-cultural educational topics · Pedagogical issues · Hermeneutics

1 Introduction

We have composed this article as a result of our own curiosity so the readers should bear this in mind, because they may feel that these pages have been written out of sheer indulgence, perhaps even silliness, but they should be seen as respect. Neal (1990) posed some questions about the role of computers in literary study asking what Athens has to do with Silicon Valley. We think that the relation between classical myths and computers could be scientific, cultural, and educational relevant.

We concentrate more those questions. The underlying argument in this paper could be an interesting one and not lightweight. It pushes a thesis far beyond drawing some correspondences between the computers and figures from classical mythology. However, we are not referring to the computer as something absolute, though some of our examples later on refer to various phenomena not necessarily directly related to them, but a constellation of *ad hoc* facets: epiphenomena here named as Computer World.

The classical myth is one of the cultural phenomena which has the most direct influence on the way in which men and women think, their conscience, history, and the exegesis of their seminal linguistics texts. Greek and Roman myths are present in all sorts of different societies and cultures around the world. They are effective largely because they successfully combine fun and learning, pleasure and teaching not in vain many terms, ideas, and conceptions are based in Greek myths. In the Western culture, classical mythology offers a rich source of lore that is still used today as a reference for modern stories. It has pervaded the arts, sciences and now, as this paper argues, the Computer World. These old tales have repeatedly shed their skins, changed their clothing, traversing cultures, and mentalities to become powerfully complex, multi-faceted symbolic pieces. Myths have metamorphosed over the centuries, and this in itself is a unique cultural phenomenon predicted by Ovid himself in his *Metamorphoses*, if you pardon the repetition.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2011) offers four definitions of myth. The first states that "myth is a usually

A. Fernández-Cano (✉)
Department of Research Methods in Education,
College of Educational Sciences, University of Granada,
Campus de Cartuja, 18071 Granada, Spain
e-mail: afcano@ugr.es

A. Fernández-Guerrero
Unit of Computer-Aided Architectural Design, Graduate School of Architecture, University of Granada, Campus de Aynadamar, 18071 Granada, Spain